Creative Art Experiences
For Children With Special Needs
Create an Arts-Encouraging Environment

Arrange art areas that encourage creative freedom
- Modify the space and equipment to support each individual.
- Adapt the size and type of seating so each person can sit in a comfortable position conducive to exploring art materials. Young children with special needs may prefer to work on the floor, standing at a table, or seated upright with adaptive equipment. Youth and adults may create best with feet firmly planted on the floor and seated upright in chairs without wheels. Observe for signs of physical comfort and ability to reach materials.
- Adjust lighting according to visual needs and setting.
- Choose high-quality art materials
  - Offer a variety of art media, surfaces, and tools to encourage experimentation.
  - Offer washable drawing and painting materials. People with special needs often have motor coordination challenges. Assuring them that washable colors will easily wash out of clothing and off of hands helps encourage creative exploration without fear of stains.
  - Choose drawing materials and paints in a variety of colors that stimulate or soothe. Encourage painters to blend colors for variety and control over choices.
  - Offer three-dimensional materials with interesting hues and textures for sculpting, collage, and construction.
  - Select high-quality art materials—such as Crayola crayons that lay down rich, smooth color and Crayola paints that blend easily and won’t flake off paper when dry. Often, emerging artists blame themselves when art supplies don’t work properly. High-quality materials increase every user’s level of support and success.

Introduce new sensory and expressive experiences
- Prepare students to use new art tools or materials by discussing different features first.
- Encourage experiencing new art materials by use of the senses. Ask, “How does the material feel?” “What does it remind you of?” or “How does it smell to you?”
- Freely explore the new art tool or medium together. If necessary, the leader’s hand may be placed over the student’s to gently guide and instill confidence.

Interact and encourage people with special needs
- Offer help only if it appears to be needed, to enable an individual’s maximum freedom of expression.
- Use encouraging words to bolster continued interest and pride in creative expression. Compliments should focus on the person’s efforts and enjoyment rather than comparative comments about what has been created.
- Role modeling brave exploration is often more encouraging than verbal coaxing. Work side by side with the individual to encourage “stretching” into new areas. Show respect for the process and strengthen the relationship by building similar objects, painting with the same colors, or taking turns leading and following.

Encouraging Words
You might say...
- “I see that you…” (followed by observation, not evaluation)
- “My eye is really drawn to…”
- “This is interesting to me because…”
- “When I look at this I feel…”

You might ask...
- “What do you imagine when you look at your art?”
- “What stands out for you as you look over your art?”
- “Tell me about your creation.”
- “What inspired you to paint/draw this?”
- “What media/ideas would you like to explore next?”

Invite family members, artists-in-residence, community volunteers, and other artists of various ages and abilities to join in the art experience. Think of practical ways others could get involved. Perhaps they could “set the stage” by mixing paints or gathering surfaces and visual stimuli. They may enjoy directly contributing to a collaborative piece of art or creating another piece, along side the artist. Collaborations build excitement and enthusiasm for creativity and strengthen personal connections.

Kansas • Zack Oswald
“I Know Ya 1” • moonprint (18”x15”) • 2004
An array of convenient, adaptable Crayola drawing tools is available for children and adults with special needs. Coloring is a relaxing activity at any age!

**Try Crayola Twistables® Crayons and Colored Pencils**

Twist-to-advance crayons and colored pencils are easy to grip and less likely to break, particularly if squeezed in immature, tight fist grasps. No sharpening or label peeling is necessary. These unique crayons and pencils stay the same length as they are used, which gives physically challenged users more motor control and surface area to grasp.

- Vary the drawing pressure on a Twistables crayon or colored pencil by pressing firmly or lightly to create a deeper or lighter color.
- Tape two or three Twistables crayons or colored pencils together to create a multiple-point drawing tool to make stripes, plaids, or multiple lines.

**Discover the versatility of erasables**

Now it’s easy to make changes and corrections when drawing and writing in color. Each Crayola crayon and colored pencil is tipped with its own eraser.

- Erasables work best on slick paper such as recycled file folders, poster board, or paper plates.
- Draw in reverse. Fill the page with color. Erase lines, designs, and shapes. It’s an artful way to create designs representing memories or concerns—and then make them disappear.
- Older students know that erasable highlighters are perfect to mark, and change, main points that they need to study.
- With erasables, all ages of people with special needs can get the results they want and enjoy the control that erasing mistakes provides.

**Explore Twistables Slick Stix™ Super-Smooth Crayons**

Super-smooth, colorful Twistables Slick Stix glide across a variety of surfaces. A simple twisting motion of the durable plastic barrel advances the stick. No sharpening or label peeling is needed.

- Try smooth, color-intense Slick Stix on surfaces including paper, foil, cardboard, foam, poster board, sandpaper, paper towels, and waxed paper. The colors set in just a few minutes.
- Blend hues by overlapping recently colored areas. Rub with a finger. Or blend one color over another.

**Create dramatic results with Color Explosion™ Paper and Markers!**

Create visually stimulating, multicolor effects with a color-reveal marker. The marker works only with the special Color Explosion Paper. Drawings can be done freehand or with stencils.

- Mark over an area once to reveal the multicolor effects. Draw squiggly, jagged, wavy, or bumpy lines.
- Draw with the tip of the color-reveal marker to make thin lines. Draw with the side of the tip to make thick lines.
- Cut bits of Color Explosion Paper for creative collage crafts such as mosaic wreaths, cards, and mobiles.

**Rely on washable markers, crayons, and paints**

Crayola washable products clean up easily, completely, and fast. Students who have motor coordination challenges can create without worry about staining when they use Crayola art supplies especially formulated for advanced washability and bright colors. Encourage experimentation!

- Create new colors by overlapping different marker colors.
- Use the tip of the marker to make a pattern of dots. Fill in shapes and areas with close dots of one color or various colors.
- Spritz paper with water, draw on wet coffee filters, and try other effects with washable products, too!

**Add pizzazz with colored pencils**

Made with thick, softer leads so they won’t break easily under pressure, clean and easily transportable colored pencils are ideal for sketching and writing indoors or outdoors.

- Use the colored pencil tip to draw fine lines. Hold the pencil so the side of the tip is flat on the paper to create wide lines and shadows.
- To fill in shapes and areas of a drawing with color, cover the area with closely spaced lines. Make the lines parallel or perpendicular, thick, thin, jagged, wavy, or bumpy.

**Count on Anti-Roll® and triangular crayons**

These products are designed to stay in place. Triangular crayons guide fingers toward a writing grip. Both types of crayons are perfect for assuring that drawing materials remain close at hand.

- Unwrap these crayons to take advantage of their flat surfaces, which work beautifully for texture rubbings.
- Wrap three or more crayons with a rubber band to color with multiple hues.
Painting with brushes and a variety of tools is a satisfying activity that engages developing artists. Indoors or out, painting offers many opportunities for kinesthetic learning and free expression of ideas and feelings.

**Explore with fingerpaint**
- Encourage developing artists to make strokes, waves, wiggles, finger and thumbprints, and other marks with different parts of the hand and arm, even the feet. The smooth, fluid movements promote kinesthetic learning.
- Suggest painting on half of a piece of paper. Fold it closed and smooth down with hands. Unfold to reveal a mirror image of the design on the other side.
- Offer combs, leaves, stiff brushes, sponges, sticks, cotton swabs, and other found objects for use on a wet fingerpainted surface. Leave small items in the paint to add texture.

**Experience soothing watercolors**
- Pre-moisten all watercolor pans with drops of clean water for 2-3 minutes prior to starting the painting process. Pre-moistened watercolors will guarantee painting success.
- Demonstrate how to use the medium. Dip brush into a wet watercolor pan. Dab color onto paper to make spots of color. Rinse brush in dish of water before choosing a new color.
- Using watercolor on damp paper creates a beautiful flowing visual effect and can be particularly satisfying for people who experience motor coordination challenges.
- Encourage experimenting with color. Add lots of water to the brush and dip in paint to make subtle colors. Or dampen paper with a sponge before painting. For more intense colors, dab the wet brush on a paper towel before picking up colors. Paint wet designs so the colors’ edges overlap and blend together.

**Count on bright, washable paints**
- Demonstrate simple painting techniques that are appropriate for the abilities of the user. For example, load a wide brush with paint to create large shapes and lines. Use liner brushes for more detail. Urge physically challenged artists to reach across the body’s midline by painting the far corners on a large sheet of paper to help strengthen motor skills.
- Play with colors and patterns. Paint over wet colors with a damp brush. Blend one color into another. Paint lines, dots, and letters over dry paint. Repeating patterns helps build coordination.
- Dip a brush into two different colors, one on each side of the brush tip. Paint strokes and dabs on paper.
Practical Tips

- **Recommend** that individuals wear washable clothing and/or smocks to encourage free movement.
- **Cover** painting surface with recycled newspaper. Keep both damp and dry paper towels on hand.
- **Premeisten** pans of watercolors if an individual has difficulty controlling the amount of water. For rinsing brushes, use low, flat pans of water that will not spill easily.
- **Painting** on a horizontal surface gives the painter control by lessening the risks of gravity moving paint that has been applied. Painting on vertical surfaces, such as easels, gives painters important opportunities to strengthen large-motor coordination. Experiment with what surface position works best for each person.
- **To make** brushes easier to grasp, slide foam hair rollers with center holes over the handles. Or wrap Model Magic® modeling material around handles to make custom grips. Air-dry and then seal them with a glaze.
- **Use painting as an alternative to pencil-and-paper activities, particularly for those who may have fine-motor challenges.** The paint’s responsiveness to slight motions and vivid color lay-down with light contact can be very reinforcing for those who have difficulty getting a bold mark with a pencil.
- **When working with washable paints, squeeze a small amount of each color into palettes or paper cups.** To minimize unwanted color mixing or constant rinsing of brushes, provide one brush for each color.
- **Artists who are sensitive to touch may be more comfortable wearing gloves or using tools with fingerpaint.** Offer toy vehicles to roll through paint or provide small leafy twigs, feathers, cotton swabs, or sticks to brush paint.

Kentucky • Aislinn Lindsey
“Aislinn’s Pretty Butterfly” • tempera (18”x24”) • 2005

District of Columbia • Jackie Coleman
“Untitled” • acrylic (16”x20”) • 2005

Painting Experiences to Offer in Inclusive Programs

**Scratch Away.** Suggest that the user spread fingerpaint colors across the paper. Scratch away lines, shapes, figures, words, and other designs in the wet paint with fingertips or simple tools such as craft sticks or combs.

**Multicolored Finger Prints.** Paint different colors on each fingertip and finger. Paint the palm another color. Press hand down onto paper. Make several handprints.

**Dot Designs.** Make fingerpaintings completely out of dots created with fingertips, cotton swabs, or other tools.

**Share the Experience.** Fingerpainting isn’t just for kids! Invite family members to fingerpaint alongside a loved one, perhaps someone who has experienced a memory loss or neurological impairment, to create a new shared memory.

**Color Flow.** Dampen paper with a wet sponge or briefly hold paper under water. Lay paper flat on table. Brush one color across the top of the paper. Hold paper up and watch colors run down page.

**Paint to Music.** Play music while painting. Color choices and designs are based on what individuals hear, feel, and imagine.

**Crayon & Watercolor Resist.** Heavily color lines, shapes, and designs on paper with crayons. Then brush over designs with wet watercolor to see designs “pop” through.

**Colorful Feelings.** Offer a choice of colors that might represent different feelings. Paint lines and shapes that express happiness, sadness, anger, calmness, love, or fear, for example.

**Story Sticks.** Paint cardboard tubes or tree branches. When dry, use them as many ancient cultures did, as conversation tools. The person holding the stick has the group’s attention during a meeting or storytelling session.

**Silent Stories.** Provide paper and paints to individuals who may be reluctant or unable to speak. Suggest free painting. Describe and discuss the art process to facilitate communication. Not all stories are spoken.

**Strength Building.** Suggest that children paint with the brush in the other (non-predominant) hand. This is an interesting exploration that builds motor coordination.
Three-dimensional art experiences, particularly those using modeling materials, provide tactile stimulation and sensory reinforcement. Many people find it pleasant to use modeling materials and feel stress relief from these tactile experiences.

Techniques to suggest or demonstrate for modeling materials

- Pinch, squeeze, and press.
- Roll thick and thin sheets.
- Roll balls, coils, and ribbons.
- Shape and cut with craft sticks or plastic dinnerware.
- Flatten balls to make disks or pancake shapes.
- Use recycled plastic containers, cardboard rolls, and other items upon which to sculpt larger pieces.

Practical Tips

- Prepare a well-defined work surface to promote success. Use a large tray to provide boundaries where all pieces and tools can remain within reach and help maintain student focus by limiting distractions.
- For those with visual perception challenges, arrange a work surface that contrasts with the modeling compound, such as light material on a dark surface.
- To flatten modeling compounds, use hands, rolling pin, or even a tortilla press, depending on the artist’s ability, to strengthen upper body control.
- Provide cookie cutters, stampers, and molds for individuals who want to create identifiable creatures or patterns. These tools can make detailed designs that might be difficult to create free form.
- Offer rubber gloves for individuals with sensory integration or tactile resistance issues who may dislike feeling the modeling material.
- Use Crayola Model Magic to customize pen or pencil grips. Shape a bit of compound around any writing instrument to conform to an individual’s grasp.

Modeling Experiences for Inclusive Programs

- **Character Bases.** Roll out sheet of dough to use with small play figures (people, animals, cars). The base enables artists with physical disabilities to manipulate figures without having pieces move or fall over.
- **In and Out.** Add different sizes of beads, stones, shells, or sequins to dough for unique tactile experiences. Artists use a pincer grasp to pull items out of dough to improve fine-motor dexterity.
- **Coiled Bowls or Pinch Pots.** Demonstrate how to construct a specific item (such as a simple coiled bowl or pinch pot) using visual or verbal cues and other prompts.
- **Story Puppets.** Create figures and backdrops to act out a story or memory. By using figures, individuals often can view their experiences in a new way.
- **Personal 3-D Portrait.** Offer white, natural, or colorful Model Magic modeling material to create a face as an exercise in self-expression and self-image. Provide a mirror as a visual guide. Add words and images to the air-dried face with washable markers. Repeat the activity later. Compare the portraits.
- **Stretch to Music.** Listen to music while exploring the texture and malleability of air-dry clay. Use this tangible art form to show the flow and energy of the music.
- **3-D Letters & Numbers.** Encourage development of manual dexterity by rolling balls and pressing them into disks. Use craft sticks to carve lines, letters, shapes, and numbers into disks. Air-dry and paint. Manipulate disks in literacy and math activities for tactile reinforcement of the symbols’ shapes.
Taking creativity outdoors opens up opportunities to create large-scale artwork, benefit from nature as inspiration, exercise gross-motor skills, and engage in activities and games that promote social interaction. Check the Crayola outdoor art section at local stores to see what innovative surfaces and tools are a good match for individual skills.

**Design with sidewalk chalk**
- Suggest making large lines, letters, waves, and wiggles on sidewalks, cardboard boxes, or paper bags. Or securely cover a table or floor with large paper for chalk drawing.
- Show how to use full arm movements with chalk in each hand to draw circles with the tip or sides of the chalk.
- Demonstrate ways to shade areas or make thick lines using the side of a piece of chalk.

**Experience the versatility of sidewalk paint**
- Encourage painting of sidewalks, safe parking lots, rocks, or sticks—a little rain (or spray of a hose) will likely wash away the paint.
- Recommend that painters wear well-worn shoes or boots. For a fun activity, ask a child to sit on a chair near the painting area. Apply paint to his or her shoe soles. Or pour paint into recycled foam trays to step in. Make a path of footprints on the sidewalk for others to follow.
- Mix paint colors in recycled plastic containers to form new colors.
- Use sponges and other painting tools if brushes are difficult to manipulate.

**Creative Outdoor Art Explorations**

**Life-Size Portrait.** A child lies on a safe outdoor surface while a partner outlines this person’s body with sidewalk chalk. Young artists then add colors, words, and designs both inside and outside of the drawing.

**Mobility Course.** With one or more people with special needs, create a mobility course on a safe outdoor surface using sidewalk chalk or paint. Draw a path that snakes around with twists and turns. For challenges, draw “puddles” to step over or navigate around. Adaptive mobility apparatus can be used to navigate the course. Some individuals may enjoy assistance from a partner.

**Wheels Away Art.** Try wheelchair, tricycle, or stroller painting on a safe outdoor surface with sidewalk paint. Pour out puddles and splatters of paint. Invite artists to move their wheeled vehicles through the paint. Take photos of the artists and their artwork. Use water and towels to clean the wheels.

**Practical Tips**
- Choose safe, large outdoor areas away from traffic.
- Children or adults with mobility or manipulation impairments may require wedges, pillows, and other equipment to support their bodies while creating art at ground level.
- Water is an important component in outdoor art activities and can be very appealing because it is so familiar. Children often enjoy creating with water alone or in combination with other media. Provide unbreakable containers of water, brushes, and sponges to encourage experimentation. See how adding strokes, splashes, and puddles of water transforms art outdoors.
- Take almost any art activity outdoors. Clouds, foliage, flowers, birds, and fresh air may inspire artists!
### Art Exploration Benefits

#### Drawing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical</th>
<th>Sensory</th>
<th>Communication</th>
<th>Cognitive</th>
<th>Social/Emotional</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eye-hand coordination</td>
<td>Focus on sensory stimulation</td>
<td>Visual expression of ideas &amp; feelings</td>
<td>Mental stimulation &amp; focusing</td>
<td>Discharges tension &amp; reduces anxieties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity puts movement to feeling</td>
<td>Visual attention &amp; processing</td>
<td>Verbal expression of process</td>
<td>Problem-solving skills &amp; organization of thoughts</td>
<td>Attention to internal feelings &amp; processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manual dexterity, precision</td>
<td>Here-and-now sensory focusing</td>
<td>Provides avenue for self-expression through use of color and visual images</td>
<td>Attention to detail</td>
<td>Facilitates identification &amp; expression of emotion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hand &amp; finger grasp</td>
<td>Utilization of sensory feedback</td>
<td>Promotes connection to &amp; interaction with others</td>
<td>Creativity</td>
<td>Awareness of individuality &amp; uniqueness</td>
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#### Painting

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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hand &amp; finger control</td>
<td>Visual attention &amp; processing</td>
<td>Non-verbal expression of ideas, emotions, messages</td>
<td>Mental stimulation</td>
<td>Self-esteem &amp; sense of accomplishment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finger exploration &amp; deliberate movements (fingerpainting)</td>
<td>Stimulation on fingertips</td>
<td>Verbal discussion of process &amp; artwork</td>
<td>Metacognition through expression of thought processes while painting</td>
<td>Socialization through interaction &amp; conversation with other artists, family members, and/or therapist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dexterity, precision</td>
<td>Utilization of visual sensory feedback</td>
<td>Opportunity for spontaneous, self-directed conversation</td>
<td>Problem-solving skills</td>
<td>Patience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large &amp; small muscle groups</td>
<td>Responding to sensory input</td>
<td>Promotes connection to &amp; interaction with others</td>
<td>Creativity</td>
<td>Matches actions &amp; expression to feelings</td>
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#### Modeling

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eye-hand coordination</td>
<td>Tactile stimulation</td>
<td>Physical expression of ideas</td>
<td>Mental stimulation</td>
<td>Promotes pretend play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two-handed manipulation</td>
<td>Visual attention &amp; processing</td>
<td>Verbal expression of process</td>
<td>Encourages problem-solving skills</td>
<td>Play with figures generates interaction &amp; conversation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dexterity, agility, precision</td>
<td>Bilateral sensorimotor coordination</td>
<td>Opportunity for spontaneous, self-directed conversation</td>
<td>Forms new neural connections</td>
<td>Express feelings in three dimensions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pincer grasp and fine-motor coordination</td>
<td>Utilization of sensory feedback</td>
<td>Promotes connection to and interaction with others</td>
<td>Creativity</td>
<td>Awareness of individuality and uniqueness</td>
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#### Outdoor Art

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Cognitive</th>
<th>Social/Emotional</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Large motor skills</td>
<td>Sensory stimulation</td>
<td>Using words &amp; pictures to communicate a message</td>
<td>Mental stimulation</td>
<td>Can be independent or social activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motor planning skills</td>
<td>Visual attention &amp; processing</td>
<td>Cooperative projects foster co-planning &amp; discussion</td>
<td>Planning &amp; problem-solving skills</td>
<td>Fosters self-confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manual dexterity &amp; wrist rotation</td>
<td>Observation of nuances of color, detail, shape, line</td>
<td>Opportunity for spontaneous, self-directed expression</td>
<td>Sequencing steps to complete a design</td>
<td>Stress &amp; anxiety release</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement of body in vertical &amp; horizontal spaces</td>
<td>Utilization of sensory feedback</td>
<td>Promotes connection to &amp; interaction with others</td>
<td>Creativity</td>
<td>Awareness of individuality &amp; uniqueness</td>
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Art makes a difference!
Engaging art experiences enable individuals of all ages to learn through various media and strengthen their motor and thinking skills. Creative expression helps people communicate their thoughts and feelings and can be extremely satisfying for challenged adults and children enabling them to more successfully thrive in their families, schools, and communities. With the assistance of a teacher, specialist, and/or therapist in a safe and supportive environment, people develop as they use art materials and tools in ways that are adapted to their individual needs.

Expressive, adapted art experiences are offered in schools, hospitals, rehabilitation centers, clinics, private offices, and homes. Professionals who work in inclusive settings include educators of children with special needs, psychologists, and psychiatrists as well as art, occupational, physical, and play therapists.

Everyone can benefit from engaging art experiences
People of all ages and backgrounds with developmental, physical, medical, educational, social, and emotional challenges can benefit from learning through creative art activities. Visual expression can promote progress for individuals who have been diagnosed with developmental delays, experienced trauma, or are challenged by addictions. Art explorations can be offered to individuals, families, groups, and communities.

Individualized Education Plans (IEP) are prepared for students who have identified disabilities. Teams of teachers, parents, medical consultants, therapists, and other specialists set annual goals for each individual. We recommend that Art Teachers are included in IEP teams and encourage inclusion of visual arts into the IEP of each student.

Art is beneficial for individuals with various challenges and medically diagnosed conditions including:

- ADD/ADHD
- addiction
- Alzheimer’s
- arthritis
- Asperger's syndrome
- autism
- cancer
- cerebral palsy
- chronic illness
- chronic pain
- depression
- developmental delays
- Down syndrome
- hearing loss
- learning disabilities
- loneliness
- memory loss
- mental illness
- mental retardation
- motor skill deficits
- neurological challenges
- stroke
- trauma
- visual perception challenges

Crayola extends thanks to VSA Arts for photographs and artwork used in this brochure.

VSA arts is an international, non-profit organization founded in 1974 by Ambassador Jean Kennedy Smith to create a society where all people with disabilities learn through, participate in, and enjoy the arts. Each year millions of people participate in VSA arts programs through a nationwide network of affiliates and in more than 60 countries around the world. For more information, visit www.vsarts.org.

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