

# Eleven Ways to Nurture Young Artists

Rama Hughes

Parents ask me a similar question every year: “My child has a talent for art; how can I support that?” My answer has been refined by fifteenish years of experience. Parents, this article is for you.

## 1. Provide art supplies

Often, students ask me for art supplies because they don’t have access to them at home. If you can’t afford the full shebang, remember that most dollar stores have an aisle for art supplies.

Give your child a small budget and let him or her buy a new pen or tube of paint. My family calls these “art snacks,” and my kids put them to use almost as soon as we get home.

## 2. Make your own art

Simply put, model creativity for your children. They will be inspired if they see you creating, trying, failing, and learning also. If you are one of those parents who think that you have no artistic talent, then practice it for your children. You will surprise yourself.

## 3. Limit screen time

Television and video games are art forms of their own. I have nothing against them, but they are a time-suck. So, set limits on your child’s screen-time. To fill the void left by television, my children have made animations and designed video games of their own.

## 4. Make art a family activity

Art does not have to be a rigorous exercise; it can be something fun that your family does together. Play Pictionary. Draw pictures of each other. Bring notepads to draw animals while at the zoo. Associating art with family fun will help your child to make it a hobby of their own.

## 5. Enter the art world

Go to museums, art openings, craft fairs, and comic book conventions. Help your child see how much he or



she has in common with professional artists in the real world. Kids are less likely to give up if they have real art heroes with whom they can identify.

## 6. Make friends with other artists

If you surround your child with other children who enjoy art, they will push each other to make more and better art. Make new friends at art classes or art museums. Invite old friends to that sketchbook safari that I men-

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tioned earlier. Host “crafternoons” where young artists come over to work on their projects together.

## 7. Let your child choose an art class

Most parents think that classes are the best first way to support their children’s interest in art. In my experience, this is wrong for two reasons. First, it regiments their playtime.

That’s no fun. Second, it turns art into another academic subject for which they might feel judged.

That said, classes are a fantastic way to expand skills and make friends. So, give your child options. Many art schools or museums offer classes devoted to specific subjects such as architecture, comic book publication, or t-shirt design. Workshops such as these inspire growth without threatening a child’s current skill set.

## 8. Make art an excuse

This is a big one in my home. When I want to encourage my children’s creativity, I let them use it as a proverbial “get out of jail” card. When my son was creating his own coloring book, for example, I knew that he might run out of steam before it was completed. So, I told him that he could stay up beyond his bedtime as long as he was drawing. He drew every night and finished his book in about a week. His accomplishment earned praise from his teachers, and that motivated him

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**Eleven Ways to Nurture Young Artists**

**1. Praise the process**  
Praise the child's effort, not just the final product. Focus on the child's choices and the process of creating the artwork. This helps build confidence and encourages experimentation.

**2. Provide an open space**  
Create a dedicated area for art-making. This space should be accessible and have all the materials needed for art-making. This encourages the child to explore and experiment.

**3. Model and encourage play**  
Art-making is a form of play. Encourage the child to explore and experiment with different materials and techniques. This helps build confidence and encourages experimentation.

**4. Avoid over-criticism**  
Avoid over-criticism of the child's work. Focus on the process and the child's choices. This helps build confidence and encourages experimentation.

**5. Encourage the child to share**  
Encourage the child to share their work with others. This helps build confidence and encourages experimentation.

**6. Provide a variety of materials**  
Provide a variety of materials for art-making. This encourages the child to explore and experiment.

**7. Encourage the child to experiment**  
Encourage the child to experiment with different materials and techniques. This helps build confidence and encourages experimentation.

**8. Provide a variety of challenges**  
Provide a variety of challenges for the child. This encourages the child to explore and experiment.

**9. Encourage the child to reflect**  
Encourage the child to reflect on their work. This helps build confidence and encourages experimentation.

**10. Provide a variety of opportunities**  
Provide a variety of opportunities for the child to share their work. This helps build confidence and encourages experimentation.

**11. Encourage the child to be proud**  
Encourage the child to be proud of their work. This helps build confidence and encourages experimentation.

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to make another book the following year. Similarly, our daughter doesn't have to tidy up when she has a project in progress. Art is always better than "real" work. Every artist knows that.

**9. Praise process over product**

A piece of art is the result of hours—sometimes even years—of observation, experimentation, decision making, and discovery. The finished product might be nice, but the true value of art is in its creation.

With that in mind, be careful not to praise a young artist's talent or even the quality of their work. Notice your child's determination, his or her willingness to experiment, their patience, perseverance, enthusiasm, and attention to detail. It takes practice to change the way you speak, but there is a story behind every work of art.

Ask questions about the artwork. Ask about the artist's thoughts or feelings. Ask about the challenges and what the artist learned. Your attention and willingness to listen demonstrate that the process itself is worthwhile.

**10. Understand frustration**

Don't worry if your child gets frustrated with his or her art. People don't get frustrated about things unless they care about them. You can help your little artist unpack his or her feelings with these four sentences: "I can tell that you are frustrated. Do you know what that means? That means that you really care about your art. I am so proud of you for caring this much."

**11. Don't force it**

Imagine for a moment that your child's interest in art is a sprout. You can't force a sprout to grow, but you can provide a supportive environment. Nurturing your child's art requires the same attentive patience. Any of the tips on this list will get you and your child off to a good start.

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