



Learning & Education PROGRAMS

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Playing with the Arts

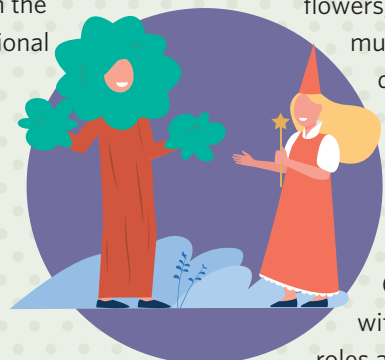
“The arts,” or dramatic play, art, music, and movement are valuable tools for supporting the healthy development of children. The arts allow children to practice math, science, language, literacy, and motor skills through play.

Most of all, the arts are crucial in the development of social and emotional skills such as self-identity, friendship, empathy, and self-control. Thoughtfully planning an environment that is rich in the arts allows children the freedom to choose or create activities that are of interest to them and socially interact with each other.

Dramatic play supports children in sharing personal stories. When engaged in imaginative play, children are inventing stories, assigning

each other roles to play, organizing props, deciding how those props will be used, negotiating, problem-solving, and interacting with each other. Include materials that children may see in their own home such as a vase of flowers, a tablecloth, chopsticks, pillows, multicultural dolls, take-out menus in different languages, a calculator, pretend money, and empty boxes or containers with familiar labels for coffee, tea, masa (corn flour), or spices.

Caregivers can provide children with opportunities to explore social roles and careers by transforming the dramatic play area frequently. Store props for creating a hospital, post office, library, zoo, fire station, dance studio, or farmer’s market in boxes and invite children to help



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BRAIN BREAKS

Children spend a large part of their day sitting and using technology. Scheduling a five minute break every thirty to sixty minutes can help children release energy, process the information they have learned, and refocus. Brain breaks are healthy for adults too! Here are some brain break activities to try:

- Dance to a song
- Move like your favorite animal
- Jump rope
- Play hopscotch
- Pat your head and rub your tummy at the same time
- Squish play dough or clay
- Invent a special handshake
- Do deep breathing
- Stretch your arms, legs, and back
- Try a yoga pose
- Create a handclapping game





Developing Self-Identity

Adults can support the development of children by providing them opportunities to build a strong self-identity and a positive attitude toward our diverse community. Understanding who they are and how they are connected to others gives children a sense of belonging and purpose. As children grow, they learn to associate themselves with their names, what they are able to do, their family, and the opinions of others. A thoughtfully planned learning environment and curriculum can help start conversations about similarities and differences.

Include mirrors and family photos that allow children to see themselves and notice their own physical characteristics. Art materials that include paint, crayons, markers, and paper that represents varied skin tones allows children to create self-portraits and portraits of friends and family. Children can look in a mirror or at a photo as they draw portraits. Encourage children to share stories about their art, themselves, and their families.

Select books that represent diverse people and lifestyles. Books can help introduce children to new ideas and start conversations. Invite children to ask questions as you read, and answer their questions honestly and openly. These conversations are opportunities to promote understanding and exploration of the qualities that make everyone both alike and different.

Offer opportunities for children to explore materials that are similar and different. Use muffin tins, plastic divided serving trays, empty toolboxes, or shoeboxes to provide children with opportunities to gather, sort, and divide buttons, leaves, rocks, seashells, and other materials. Make charts and graphs with children about their physical differences and preferences such as the number of people who have brown hair, or whether they prefer apples or oranges.

Early opportunities to explore similarities and differences with a caring adult influence can positively impact children's development of self-identity and biases. When adults approach conversations with children about their world with an open and positive attitude, then children are more likely to continue having conversations and develop an appreciation for the beauty in themselves and others.



Transitioning to Child Care

It is not unusual for children to have an emotional reaction when they enter child care for the first time. From the child's point of view, they are being left alone in an unfamiliar place with new people, rules, and routines. After being home during the pandemic, many children will find it challenging to return to child care or school, even if it is a familiar place for them.

This can be an adjustment for parents too. They are trusting other people to protect and care for their children, and they are also learning how to meet the expectations of the new child care environment and follow rules for health and safety. Children and parents need patience, reassurance, and support during this transition. Once caregivers, parents, and children have had a chance to form trusting relationships with each other, the discomfort of being separated will lessen.

Encourage parents to bring their child to visit before they start. Talk to parents about what they usually do to help their child feel safe and comfortable. Invite parents to make a small poster or book of family photos to help their child feel connected to home. Children can also choose a small

comfort item to bring with them. Offer to call the parent with updates, and keep a consistent routine so that children can learn the order of daily events. Ask parents to have their child practice wearing a mask at home so they can be accustomed to the feel of wearing it for long periods of time.

To help parents learn about separation, share the Children's Home Society of California *Separation: Easing the Transition from Home to Child Care* brochure, podcast, or blog, which are available at www.chs-ca.org.



Playing with the Arts

set up dramatic play areas inside and outside. Children may also decide that the blocks, cars, or plastic animals could extend their play, and carry them into another area of the room. Providing children the flexibility to explore and utilize familiar objects in new ways develops their critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

Provide art experiences by placing supplies like paper, crayons, pencils, erasers, tape, child-safe scissors, watercolor paints, and glue on a shelf or in boxes. Add old newspapers and magazines, recycled items (boxes, plastic lids, and cardboard tubes), and items from nature (twigs, stones, and seashells). Include sculpting with playdough or clay, weaving, or using sidewalk chalk to create murals on outdoor walls. Invite children to freely explore art and develop their own plan for what they would like to make and how it should look. Artistic activities provide children with an outlet for processing emotions, experiences, thoughts, and ideas.

The exercise involved in dance and movement activities releases hormones that can help children let go of stress and experience a more positive outlook. The rhythmic patterns of music can soothe emotions and build relationship skills as children listen to each other, harmonize, or take turns. The rhythm patterns in music also translate directly into grammar and speech patterns, which improves communication skills. Children love to experiment with different sounds and music instruments. Invite children to make instruments from recycled items and add them to the instruments box. Plan group music and movement activities like drumming rhythm patterns or dancing the Hokey-Pokey, and also make instruments and music available for children to choose during free-choice play. Set aside a cozy corner where children can listen to peaceful music or nature sounds when they need to take a break. Inviting children to explore the arts on a daily basis will support their learning, physical health, and social-emotional wellbeing.

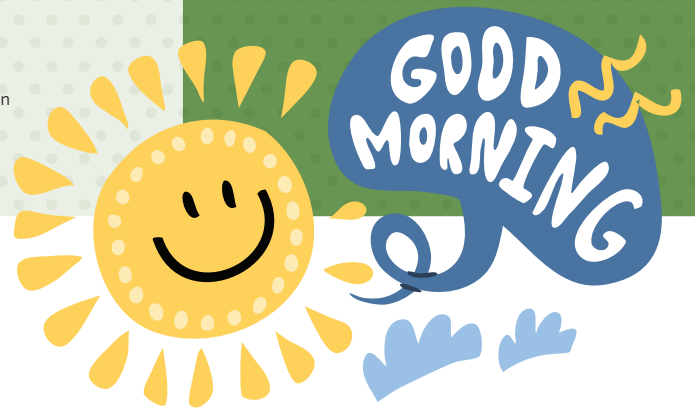
Source: *California Preschool Curriculum Framework, Volume 1* by the California Department of Education (Sacramento, 2010).

REFLECTING ON INTERACTIONS

The interactions children have with others help develop their identities. As children explore their environment and engage with others, they discover their preferences, and begin recognizing the preferences of others. A child who knows a friend's favorite color is red might hand them a red car. An adult might say, "That was thoughtful of you to remember that your friend's favorite color is red." This statement also illustrates that remembering someone's preference is thoughtful. These preferred objects and activities become part of a child's identity.

Adults can also comment about a child's strengths such as, "You turned on the water by yourself! I remember that last week you needed help with that!" These conversations help children build their identities during play. Take a moment to reflect on how your interactions with children build their identities, and how you provide children with opportunities to socialize.

Source: Adapted from the *California Preschool Curriculum Framework, Volume 1* by the California Department of Education (Sacramento, 2010).



Breakfast Casserole

Start the day with a healthy breakfast!

Ingredients

- 1 medium bell pepper, red
- 1/2 medium onion
- 1/4 cup of mushrooms
- 3 cups of spinach
- 4 cups of hash browns, frozen
- 5 large eggs
- 1 teaspoon of salt
- 1 teaspoon or black pepper
- 1 teaspoon dijon mustard
- 2/3 cup plain Greek yogurt
- 2 cups cheddar cheese, shredded

Do not thaw the hash browns. Preheat oven to 350° F. Spray a 9 x 13 baking dish with non-stick spray. Dice the red bell pepper, onion, and spinach into small pieces. Place them into the prepared baking dish and add half of the frozen hash browns. Whisk together the eggs, salt, mustard, and Greek yogurt. Add the egg mixture to the baking dish. Add one and a half cups of cheese to the baking dish and set the rest of the cheese aside.

Stir the ingredients in the baking dish until they are mixed. Now add the rest of the hash browns and carefully stir until everything is coated in the egg mixture. Spread the remaining cheese across the top. Bake the casserole for about fifty minutes. Check on it towards the end of the cook time. Look for the eggs to be fully set and all the liquid to be evaporated.

Source: Adapted from <https://www.superhealthykids.com/recipes/best-healthier-hashbrown-casserole-recipe/> in July 2021.

Art Explorations

Art is a wonderful way for children of all ages to express their individuality, engage in a sensory experience, develop self-esteem, and experiment with math and science concepts like size, shape, color, and space. Art experiences for young children should be focused on the process, rather than the product. The process of creating art is where the learning takes place.

Activity: Sit Down Paint Dancing

Age group: Infants



What you need: Child-sized chair, large paper, tape, dish tub with non-toxic paint, dish tub of soapy water, and old towels.

What you do: Tape the paper down on the floor under the chair and set the paint tub next to it. Children sit and dip their feet in the paint tub, then “dance” their feet on the paper. Younger infants can sit on a caregiver’s lap instead of a chair. Use the soapy water and towels to clean feet when they are done.

What they learn: Infants learn they can feel with their feet, as well as their hands. They engage in a sensory experience, work their large muscles, practice balance, and explore the concept of cause and effect.

Source: *First Art for Toddlers and Twos: Open-Ended Art Experiences* by MaryAnn F. Kohl, Renee Ramsey, and Dana Bowman (Gryphon House, 2012).

Activity: First Rubbings

Age group: Toddlers



What you need: Masking tape, objects to rub (leaves, pieces of cardboard, yarn, wrinkled foil, flat cheese grater wrapped in paper for safety, wire cooling rack wrapped in paper, etc.), chalk, oil pastels, dark-colored crayon stubs (dark colors work best), and white paper.

What you do: Secure items to be rubbed on a tabletop by putting loops of tape under each item. This prevents items from slipping. Wrap items like the cheese grater in paper for safety. Show children the items and then place a large piece of white paper on top of them. Allow children to use a variety of the writing materials to rub across the top of the paper. Talk to them about how the items underneath create patterns when rubbed.

What they learn: Children practice motor skills, experiment with art materials, explore the concept of cause and effect, and investigate patterns.

Source: *First Art for Toddlers and Twos: Open-Ended Art Experiences* by MaryAnn F. Kohl, Renee Ramsey, and Dana Bowman (Gryphon House, 2012).

Activity: String Art

Age group: Preschool

What you need:

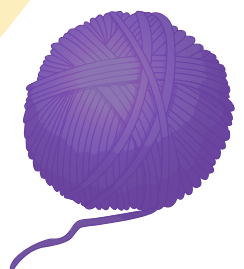
Yarn in various colors, white glue, wax paper, and shallow dishes.



What you do: Cover the bottom of each dish with glue. You can dilute the glue with a little water. Give each child a long piece of string and a sheet of wax paper. Invite children to dip the string into the dishes of glue and make a design on the wax paper with their yarn. When the yarn dries, remove it from the wax paper. The yarn will stiffen and retain the shapes the children created. Introduce new vocabulary such as flexible, stiff, sticky, wax, etc.

What they learn: Children have the opportunity to create a piece of three-dimensional art, explore the concept of cause and effect as you talk about the change to the yarn, and hypothesize about why it did not stick to the wax paper.

Source: *1-2-3 Art: Open-Ended Art Activities for Working with Young Children* by Jean Warren (Totline Publications, 1985).



Art Explorations

Activity: Still Life Painting

Age group: School Age

What you need: Flowers, vase, white paper, pencils, paints, and paint brushes.

What you do: Allow children to help arrange the flowers in the vase and place it on a table where it can easily be observed. Invite children to sketch the flowers with a pencil on their paper. Children can then select three colors to work with. The colors black and white can be used for shading or accents. Children can mix and match the three colors to form different shades. Explain to children that still life painting is an art form that illustrates commonplace objects. Visit

<https://www.vincentvangogh.org/sunflowers.jsp> to learn about Vincent Van Gogh and show children his sunflower paintings, which are examples of still life art.

What they learn: Children learn to create a two-dimensional representation of a three-dimensional object, express themselves creatively, and explore still life painting. Encourage children to find other objects they see daily that inspire them to draw or paint.

Source: Adapted from www.education.com in July 2021.



ABOUT CHS

For over 130 years, Children's Home Society of California (CHS) has adapted to the changing needs of children and families. Since 1891, CHS has worked diligently to protect our community's children and strengthen their families through diverse programs and services.

At CHS, we view a child not in isolation, but in the context of each family's health, stability, and resources. We believe that families are fundamentally strong and resilient. The mission of CHS is to reach out to children and families at risk with a range of services to ensure every child the opportunity to develop within a safe, healthy, and secure environment.

Therefore, CHS provides a variety of services to children and families in California and nationwide, working to improve their quality of life by offering vital information, education and resource services, and child care assistance.

CHS also serves as an expert resource for child care providers, other social service agencies, and government agencies at the local, state, and national level. To learn more about CHS and resources available to you, please visit our website at www.chs-ca.org.

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