

Make Art Like a Child – Process Art for Self-Expression, Confidence, and Fun

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When is the last time you made art like a child? There can be a lot of benefits to approaching art like a young child. Young children make art without all the expectations and judgments of an adult. They make art for the joy of creation, the experience of moving their bodies and releasing energy, and the sensory enjoyment of the art materials.

For children, it's truly the art PROCESS that matters, not the final PRODUCT. Although they may be proud to see a picture later hung on the fridge, they are often equally happy to just leave it behind when they are done.

Although most people think about art as pictures or sculptures that look like something or communicate a particular meaning, there can be a lot of benefit to process art. Art therapists will often remind clients that it's the process that is important, not the final product. Process art means that the focus of the art is on the experience of making the art, not the resulting art piece, and the artwork may even be thrown away afterwards. Even if your art does not look like anything recognizable or "mean" something, it can still be enjoyable, interesting, and even expressive.

However, most of us lose sight of the benefits of process art as we grow older. We start to think of art in terms of "good" or "bad," worrying about how the final product looks. We focus on art as needing to look a certain way or as needing to convey some meaning. Maybe we start to seek validation from others for our art, no longer trusting our own artistic intuition. The focus on product can lead to a lack of confidence, a judgmental attitude toward our own art, disconnections from the rhythms and sensations of our own bodies, and limited creativity.

I know that I personally enjoy and benefit from my forays into process art, both for enjoyment and to build confidence in my artistic expression. In my life I normally spend a lot of my time up in my head, planning things, and worrying about results. And in my default approach to art, I tend to worry about the outcomes, trying to make art that looks like something or conveys some meaning. Process art helps me to balance out that tendency, get in touch with a more

intuitive way of creating, and bring more fun and life into my art. Process art also helps me to practice mindfulness in my art, becoming immersed in the experience and letting go of judgment and expectations.

Engaging in process art can have a lot of potential benefits, including:

- Activating or discharging energy through movement
- Relaxation and self-soothing through engagement of the senses
- Being more in touch with your body through a focus on the senses and motion
- Mindful awareness as you focus on the present moment and the process
- Practicing non-judgmental acceptance of the art
- Stepping away from perfectionism or overthinking
- Opening yourself to new experiences and unexpected outcomes
- Brain integration and healing
- Learning new techniques that can bring richness to all your art
- Allowing emotion to naturally arise and be expressed
- Getting back in touch with art as fun

So if you are trying to build your confidence through art, I encourage you to try some process art activities. If you like creating more representational or symbolic artwork, you can always go back to those art approaches and consider process art an exercise in doing things differently for a while. You may discover that you love the art that naturally results from playing through process art.

Keep in mind that it is not just the techniques that make an art exercise “child-like” or process-oriented. Your mindset is the most important part – focusing on the process and not the product. I encourage you to spend some time being aware of, and maybe even journaling about, some of the “adult” or judgmental thoughts that come up for you around art-making and get in the way of your artistic confidence. Are you worrying about whether your art is good enough, comparing yourself to others, thinking that you aren’t talented enough, or wondering what other people will think of your art?

When you make process art, try to really set aside worries and expectations about what the final product will look like. Let yourself experience the fun of making art again, approaching it with an attitude of play. Be open and curious about what is resulting as you engage in the process. Try to engage your different senses –

noticing how the art materials feel and smell and looking closely at the marks and shapes that emerge. Tap into your inner intuition as you work – what do you *feel* like doing next? Remember that there is no right or wrong way when you are engaging in process art. And when you notice critical thoughts arising in your mind, gently set them aside and refocus on non-judgmental curiosity and awareness. When you are done with your process, take a few minutes to notice what you *appreciate* about the artwork – an interesting mark, a surprising effect, or even just the feeling that you had while working on it.

10 Process Art Ideas

1. String painting – Dip string or yarn into ink or very fluid paint. Then use the string to paint on your page, experimenting with the different lines that can be created. Notice what it's like to have very limited control over the results and appreciate the unexpected results.

2. Stamping – Use dot markers or found objects to create simple stamps. (For found object stamps, dipping into acrylic paint poured on a small tray will work better than an ink stamp pad). Cover your page with stamp marks, using different colors and stamps if you want. Focus on the release of energy as you engage in the stamping motion over and over. Notice the interesting patterns and effects that emerge.

3. Finger paint on foil – Buy finger paints or use liquid acrylic to finger paint on foil. You can try to keep the foil smooth or crumple it up first to create more texture. The foil shows through the paint in interesting ways. Focus your attention on the sensation of the paint on your hands, spending some time just moving your hands around with the paint without trying to create any particular image.

4. Action art – Place your paper in a container or tray with raised sides. Use marbles or small balls to “paint” by dipping them in paint, dropping them on the page, and then rolling them around by tipping the container in different directions. You can also squirt paint directly on the paper and then allow the marbles to roll through the paint.

5. Scribble drawing – Scribble all over your page, focusing your attention on the movement of your body as you go back and forth. You can simply stop after the scribble if you want – it makes a great warm-up exercise – or you can develop

your scribble further. You can fill in the sections with different colors, create a “zentangle” by adding patterns with a pen, or look for an image that has naturally resulted from the scribbles.

6. Dropper painting – Drop paint on your paper with an eye dropper or pipette. Try using a heavy watercolor paper and spraying it first with water to watch the paint bleed and blend on the page. Focus on watching the way the paint moves, interacts, and blends on the page. Liquid watercolors work great for this, but you can also create your own with food coloring and water.

7. Throwing/dropping paint – Dip sponges or crumpled paper in paint and throw at your paper, cardboard, or canvas. Or lay the painting surface on the ground and stand above it, dropping the sponges or paper balls. Try to enjoy the throwing motion and let go of control of the results.

8. Found object painting – Skip the paintbrush and try painting with something different, like a feather, leaves, or sticks. You can hold the object in your hand or use a clothes pin to create a handle for yourself. Notice and observe the different marks that these objects make on the page.

9. Nature Collage – Take a walk, focusing on mindful observation of the natural objects around you. Collect leaves, flowers, sticks, stones, etc. to create either a collage on paper (use cardboard if it’s heavier than just leaves and flowers) or a construction in nature. Notice the different textures, colors, and even smells of the objects that you have.

10. Torn Tissue Paper Collage – Use colored tissue paper and modge podge (or acrylic matte/gloss medium) to create a collage. Laying the pieces will allow the different colors to show through in interesting ways. Crumple, scrunch, and wrinkle the pieces as you go to create more texture. Tearing the paper instead of using scissors will force you to give up control and perfectionism. Embrace the imperfections and enjoy the vivid colors.

I hope that these art exercises allow you to play, break through self-doubts, and bring more confidence to your art-making. We all have the capacity to be creative! For more creative inspiration, be sure to explore the blog at www.creativityintherapy.com or follow me on Instagram [@creativityintherapy](https://www.instagram.com/creativityintherapy).

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