



# Supporting the Arts in the Lives of Youth: What Parents Can Do



## Why are the Arts important?

It is true that engaging in the arts -- music, dance, drama, and visual arts -- is fun, but that's not all! In *Champions of Change: The Impact of Arts Learning*, a report by the Arts Education Partnership and the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities, researchers found that participating in the arts, "nurtures the development of cognitive, social, and personal competencies." A growing body of research has suggested that sustained engagement in the arts promotes critical thinking and problem solving skills, contributes to the decrease of delinquent behavior in youth, as well as promotes positive self-esteem. In *Critical Links: Learning in the Arts and Student Academic and Social Development*, a research compendium by the Arts Education Partnership, researchers found that arts learning is linked to academic achievement in subjects other than art, such as reading and math.

## What are some ways parents can support and encourage arts learning?

1) Visit arts and craft web sites for simple activities to do at home with children of all ages and teens.

Here are a few sites worth investigating:

- ◆ [www.crayola.com](http://www.crayola.com) has arts and crafts, coloring activities, and sections for educators and parents.
- ◆ <http://www.kid-at-art.com> has art activities for elementary and middle school youth using recycled materials.
- ◆ <http://cartoonster.kidzdom.com> is a site that was created by a teenager for those interested in learning about the basics of cartoon animation.
- ◆ <http://www.kinderplanet.com/makestuf.htm> has activities for preschool and grade school children.
- ◆ <http://familyfun.go.com/arts-and-crafts/> will allow folks to sign up for their e-newsletter and receive two craft activities via e-mail each month.



2) Visit the library and check out some art books or craft activities books. Share these books with your children at home. The librarian will be able to suggest a few titles, but here are a few that received positive reviews on [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com):

- Adventures in Art: Arts & Crafts Experiences for 8- to 13-Year-Olds by Susan Milord
- EcoArt: Earth-Friendly Art and Craft Experiences for 3- to 9-Year-Olds by Laurie Carlson
- 175 Easy-To-Do Everyday Crafts by Sharon Dunn Umnik (ages 9-12 years)
- Recipes for Art and Craft Materials by Honey Roney Sattler (ages 9-12 years)
- The Kids Multicultural Art Book: Art and Craft Experiences from around the World by Alexandra Terzian (ages 4-8 years)
- The Little Hands Big Fun Craft Book: Creative Fun for 2 - to 6-Year-Olds by Judy Press and Loretta Trezzo Braren

3) Collaborate with educators and other parents to host a **Family Arts & Crafts Night** at your children's school. A free planning kit from the National PTO is available for those who have already set a tentative date to run this fun family event. The kit includes a how-to guide for setting up the night, posters to promote the activity, and reproducible flyers. Call (800) 644-3561, ext. 208 or visit [www.ptotoday.com/sfn/arts.html](http://www.ptotoday.com/sfn/arts.html) for more information.



4) During **family art time**, encourage all family members to express themselves freely and make whatever they wish. Play music in the background. First, make sure there are art supplies in the home and keep the supplies in an accessible plastic bin or specially designated "art box." The art supplies can include pens, pencils, paints and brushes, crayons, colored paper, tissue paper, scissors, yarn, paper plates, napkins, small paper bags, buttons, felt, tape, glue/glue sticks, pieces of cardboard or other items that may seem like "trash" but could possibly be used to create something interesting. Save old clothing and use them as smocks.

**TURN THE PAGE FOR MORE IDEAS !**

# Supporting the Arts in the Lives of Youth: What Parents Can Do (continued)

5) Take your children and teens to art museums, theatre, dance, and music performances in the community. Many of these events are free and open to the public. Even museums that are not art specific, such as history or science museums, may provide hands-on craft activities that relate to the museums' exhibits. Many museums host folk festivals and concerts on their grounds, especially in the summer. Become a member of local museums.



6) Take advantage of classes in the community that promote the arts. Many museums, such as the Worcester Art Museum or the Cape Museum of Fine Arts, offer courses in photography, drawing, and sculpting, for children, teens, and adults. The Museum of Fine Arts in Boston regularly offers free “drop-in” art activities.

7) At family events, such as a birthday party or family reunion, provide disposable cameras for your children to use to document the event. Later, help them make a scrapbook with the photographs.



8) Give gifts (birthdays and holidays) that support the arts, including music, art supplies, or tickets to a performance.

9) *Americans for the Arts* recommends that families create a journal of their next vacation or even a short outing, such as a trip to the zoo or attendance at a birthday party. To do this, parents and children can collect pictures, ticket stubs, confetti, or other memorabilia and paste these objects in a notebook or journal. Then, children can write captions for each page. This activity is creative and it supports literacy learning. Younger children can dictate what they would like written, and parents can record the captions in the journal for them.

10) October is **National Arts and Humanities Month**. See if your community has planned something special. Or, work with community members to plan something! For ideas, see “101 Things You Can Do to Celebrate National Arts and Humanities Month at [http://www.nasaaarts.org/nasaanews/101things\\_2004.pdf](http://www.nasaaarts.org/nasaanews/101things_2004.pdf).

## What else can parents do?

**Support arts teaching and learning in your children’s and teens school and district.** Although the Arts is a core subject under the No Child Left Behind Act, art and music programs are often the first to suffer from budgetary cuts in tight economic times. This is distressing, especially in light of the *Champions for Change* report which indicates that the arts have a special ability to, “reach students who are not otherwise being reached.” The report also states that researchers have found that the arts have a unique ability to engage at-risk youth in their school and community and when youth feel engaged in school, they are more likely to succeed. Knowing that arts learning is linked to academic success, parents and other adults need to advocate for the arts and oppose budget cuts. Visit the U.S. Education Department’s Web site at [www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/secletter/040701.html](http://www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/secletter/040701.html) to review a letter written to school superintendents by Secretary of Education Rod Paige on how districts can be flexible in providing funding for the arts. Adults can make their voices heard about this matter at city/town meetings, attend school council meetings, write a letter to their children’s school superintendent talking about the importance of arts learning, or write a letter to the editor of the local town paper to rally local support. ☆

**Please note that when we write the “parent” throughout this tip sheet, we mean any adult responsible for the care of a child, such as grandparents or other relatives who are raising children, foster parents, guardians, etc.**

**Sources:** *Champions for Change: The Impact of Arts Learning* by the Arts Education Partnership and the President’s Committee on the Arts and Humanities at <http://aep-arts.org/PDF%20Files/ChampsReport.pdf>; *Critical Links: Learning in the Arts and Student Academic and Social Development (2002)* by the Arts Education Partnership at <http://aep-arts.org/CLhome.html>; *Elementary and Secondary Education: Key Policy Letters Signed by the Education Secretary or Deputy Secretary* at [www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/secletter/040701.html](http://www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/secletter/040701.html) (July, 2004); *Ten Tips for Parents to Keep the Arts in Their Children’s Lives (2002)* by Americans for the Arts at <http://www.americansforthearts.org>. Additional information about the benefits of arts learning was also retrieved from the *National Arts & Learning Collaborative Home Page* at <http://www.artsllearning.org>.