



a fresh coat of paint
CREATIVE PARENTING



by Diane Quiroga, MA, ATR-BC

NEW SCHOOL YEAR? START SMART WITH ART

My internal age is 4.5 years old, which is why my professional life consists of making art and playing with toys, in addition to asking and answering questions while I scribble in a notepad. I'm a Registered Art Therapist as well as a Mental Health Consultant and everyday parents ask me questions about their children, husbands, wives, grandparents, dogs, pet rocks, you name it. I have a firm belief that everyone has a creative side, literally or figuratively, and that sometimes we get stuck in the same old routine of living, loving, and working. Whether it's with our children, spouses, family members, co-workers, or most importantly, OURSELVES, we've probably all had to get a little creative in dealing with certain issues. This column will take you to a whole new level as I delve into topics that will get you looking at things a little... differently.



Self expression through the creative arts is a great way to let kids do what they want in a safe way, boost their self-esteem, and give them permission to be who they really are (which can make a BIG difference in their world).

Start with Art

Is your child dealing with separation anxiety? Try writing or drawing family member and pet names on book covers, putting pictures of your family or your pet in their desk or backpack, or letting the teacher keep a recording of your voice with a personalized message. You can also ask your child to draw a picture of their teachers, their school, and their friends for you. You can learn a great deal from these pictures. By asking lots of questions, you just might get lots of answers.

Dream Board

Making goals for the future is motivational and gives your child a sense of accomplishment when they are completed. Create a magazine collage, drawing, or written checklist of goals they'd like to achieve and things they want to do. Being able to check something off of their list really increases their self-esteem and their confidence and sense of accomplishment.

Another means of visual motivation is a Dream Board, which is essentially a poster compilation of cutout words, pictures, drawings, and written words of all of the goals they'd like to achieve. Kids have a blast making them, and they can place the Dream Board somewhere safe and visible for ongoing aspiration.

Telling Their Story

We all know that talking helps when it comes to coping, but isn't always possible. Starting a new school year creates opportunities for stories about teachers, classes, and peers, and themselves. Many children and adults find a **Visual Journal** to be extremely effective as a means of creative and emotional expression—and it isn't your typical "diary." Pick up a sketch book (blank pages, no lines), and your child can fill it with words, drawings, pictures, memorabilia, and basically anything that can be taped or glued onto a page. Some of the fun also comes in decorating the book cover and really making it their own.



For younger kids, parents can keep a **Scribble Journal** as a form of a creative outlet for their child, as well as a form of documentation of their child's progress in their creative and developmental growth. Date the pages, and let your child go where their imagination takes them. The Scribble Journal is great for showing children their advancements—and makes a great keepsake for you!

Me, Myself, and I

This is the perfect time of year for your child to begin a **Self Box**, which is essentially a 3-D model of themselves and their history. Start with a shoebox or another box that can be open and closed. Have your child label or decorate this box any way they please, both inside and out. As the year progresses, a self box may truly help a child understand and see what they're accomplishing. Movie tickets, high scoring tests, pictures with friends, and any reminders of their year will be a lot of fun to look through later on. As an advanced exercise, ask your child to decorate the outside to represent themselves on the "outside" and to decorate the inside to represent how they feel on the "inside."



Create a Comic Strip

When your child faces a challenge, it's important for them to contemplate alternatives to handling a situation. When an issue arises, ask your child to create a Comic Strip of the scenario they may have encountered or will encounter at home or school. You (or they), can draw 3 to 6 square boxes on a sheet of paper with 1 to 3 lines underneath each box to include narrative or titles. It is up to your child if they would like to include thought or word bubbles in their comic strip. Asking your child to illustrate the situation may give you an indication of your child's problem solving skills or how they perceive day-to-day circumstances. You can talk them through alternative endings. These Comic Strips can illustrate any scenario and if your child is too young to complete this task, then you can do the illustrating while your child creates the story and alternative endings. To extend this exercise, ask children to imagine themselves as a superhero, describe their traits, and what their superhero character would do in the same situation.

Self Portrait

Many children have difficulties identifying qualities they like about themselves and being positive can really boost their self-esteem on a day-to-day basis. Take a picture of your child and have them place it somewhere they can see it (make sure it's a picture that they like!). Ask your child to identify specific tasks or qualities that really accentuate particular strengths and positive characteristics, and then have your child write or draw these words around or on the picture. Being able to create and view this visual affirmation will accentuate their self-positives and remind them of their strengths on a regular basis.



Get the whole picture

Using some of these creative tasks will give you insight into your child's life, build rapport with your child so that they communicate with you, boost self-esteem, as well as offer an opportunity for fun. As school demands fluctuate from year to year, so will your child's quest for their self and identity. Through the adjustments, they will continue to need your acceptance and support. Remember, it's never too late to start smart...with art.



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