

HOW TO TALK TO CHILDREN ABOUT THEIR ART



Talk to the Child at His or Her Level.

Talking to a child at his or her level sets the tone for a respectful conversation. Try this: Sit at the table with the child or kneel down at his or her eye level to talk about what they are working on. You could also sit down to work on your own art alongside the child. This act demonstrates that you value art-making. You may also be surprised at how your ideas inspire one another.

Ask Open-Ended Questions.

Because these questions don't beg for a yes/no or one-word answer, open-ended questions encourage the child to talk. Some examples: "Can you tell me about this area (point to it) of your drawing?" or "How did you put these pieces together?" Avoid questions such as "Is that an elephant?" or "What did you use to attach the boxes together?"

Make Objective Comments about Process.

These are comments that focus on what you notice in the art-making process: colors used, shapes drawn, paper splattered, a pattern of stickers. Some example: "I noticed that you used red and orange paint to make this," or "you spent a long time working on this sculpture!" Oftentimes children will make images or build structures that look like something familiar to you...but it's something else entirely. What looks like an anteater to you may actually be a unicorn or a spaceship landing on a jellyfish. Stay clear of comments such as "I like your house" or "how did you make that tree?" While it may look like a house or tree to you, that may not be the child's idea.

Ask Follow-up Questions.

If the child says, "This is a bumblebee flying to the flower, and then the little girl picks the flower just before the bee gets to it," you could say, "I see. How does the bumblebee feel about that?" or "What might happen next?"

Paraphrase Comments and Ask for More

After the child explains their ideas, paraphrase it back to them. This shows the child that you are listening carefully and that you value their thoughts. If the child says, "The bumblebee was sad about that," you could say, "Of course, the bee was upset. Can you tell me more about this?"

