



Working with Toddlers (~1-3 year olds)

Adapted from Sasha Kopp and Jessica Stein

When entering the art room, some toddlers may be very excited to jump right in and explore; others may be more hesitant and stay close to their immediate family. Follow their lead and their energy and give parents assurance that their toddler can be whoever they are while you are together at JFAM.

Toddlers often have a short attention span. Offer a variety of short activities or materials to freely explore while big siblings focus on a longer project.

Suggested short activities from the Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art:

- [Citrus Dough Creations](#)
- [Coffee Filters and Watercolors](#)
- [Sticky Surface Collages](#)

Suggested materials to explore (Pro Tip: these can be set up anywhere toddlers need to be “busy” - art room, dining hall, Shabbat services, etc.)

- A basket of construction paper for babies and toddlers to crumble and tear
- Wide paint brushes and water (no paint necessary!) to explore, “paints” and play with
- Baskets or bins of other toys or sensory materials that are not choking hazards. Find a great list of suggested [DIY sensory bins](#) from The Early Childhood Academy.
- A basket of board books, or PJ Library indestructible books

Toddler Tips:

Toddlers are extremely sensory oriented. They love being messy and exploring new materials. They might become engrossed with the materials and explore using them in unanticipated ways (painting one’s hands rather than painting the paper). This is not only fine, but totally developmentally appropriate!

Remember - the activity is more than what you take home, it is also the process of creating it. If a young child is engaged, safe, and finding joy that's great! It's ok if every child does not create a product during your art experience.

Older toddlers love jobs and feel pride in being able to help. If there is a younger sibling in the room who could be a good helper, ask them to pass out or gather supplies. This will also keep them moving which might help them focus more on the next activity.

Put on music! Having music on can give babies and toddlers the opportunity to dance and can help adults stay calm in a chaotic room. Use paint brushes as rhythm sticks and connect to the moment through sound rather than through art.

If toddlers are grumpy, or not enjoying the project - don't take it personally! Toddlers may not be used to being in a new place surrounded by lots of people. Much of camp will be very over-stimulating for them. Let parents know where they can find a quiet place or a snack if their child needs a break. Oftentimes, young children share that they are hungry or tired through tears or frustration - that's ok! Remind parents that they are welcome and encouraged to be in the art room no matter how their children are feeling.