



Guidelines for Art Supplies

Prepared by the Health Consultant Team at Child Care Aware® of North Dakota

To meet minimal safety standards, make sure all art materials state they are non-toxic **AND** conform to ASTM D-4236. To meet the highest safety standards, make sure all art materials state they are certified by the Art and Creative Materials Institute (ACMI) and have the “AP” (Approved Product) seal. For additional information, see the ACMI online at www.acminet.org.

Along with using safe art supplies, supervision is very important when doing any type of art activity. Caregivers need to closely watch children to make sure that they are using equipment and supplies correctly and safely. It is also important for caregivers to take in account each individual child’s development and maturity when choosing suitable art activities.

Be cautious when accepting donations unless the products are relatively new and all the ingredients are known. The older the material, the more likely it is to contain harmful substances. All products should be in the original container. If you do not have the original container or if you aren’t sure a product is safe, it is best to throw it away.

Some early childhood experts believe that food should not be used for art. It can give children a misleading message about the proper use of food. If you choose to use food, it is recommended not to present it as food. For example, put the Cool Whip in another container and present it as a material for art; do not point out that it is Cool Whip. Ensuring sanitary conditions is very important if food is used for art. The food should be handled in a sanitary manner, it should be safe to eat (stored properly and current freshness date), and children’s hands should be washed and tables sanitized in case the children do eat the food. Environmental rating scales do not allow food or food scented materials to be used for art.

PRODUCTS to AVOID	SAFE to USE
Powdered clay, which is harmful to lungs and can get into children’s eyes.	Pre-mixed clay.
Adhesives not water-based, such as rubber cement or solvent-based glue.	White glue, which is the safest for children.
Glazes, paints, or finishes that contain lead	Poster paints/water-based products.
Paints that require solvents such as turpentine, to clean brushes.	Water-based paints for easier, safer clean up.
Cold-water or commercial dyes that contain chemical additives.	Natural dyes such as vegetables or onion skins.
Permanent markers that may contain toxic solvents	Water-based markers. Washable markers better choice
Instant paper-mache that may contain lead or asbestos, and use of color-printed newspaper or magazines with water.	Newspaper (black ink only) and white paste.
Aerosol sprays. The fumes can be harmful.	Pump sprays.
Powdered tempera paints. Powdered paints can get into children’s lungs or eyes.	Pre-mixed tempera paint.
Environmental rating scales to not allow use of shaving cream with infants and toddlers. If shaving cream is used with older children, use a well ventilated area due to fumes; special consideration should be given if using around children with allergies or asthma.	Foam paints
Uncooked beans (ex. kidney, pinto etc.) for projects or sensory tables. Raw beans are a small object hazard for young children. Kidney beans are toxic if as few as 4 to 5 raw beans are consumed. A bean stuck in a body opening can swell and be difficult to remove.	
Environmental Rating Scales do not allow the use of glitter with infants/toddlers. If glitter is used with older children, it is important to be aware that glitter may cause an eye injury if children rub some into their eyes.	
Peanut butter or nuts for art projects with infants or toddlers or if there is a child in the class that is allergic to peanuts	Sunbutter
Possible choking hazards such as small eyes, Styrofoam packing peanuts, foam pieces, beads, etc. with infants and toddlers. These items should only be used with children 3 years or older	

Sources:
 Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale, revised edition, 2003
 Early Childhood Health Link, Volume 14: Issue 4, Fall 2003
 Healthy Young Children, revised edition, 2002

All About the ITERS-R, 2004
 Healthy Child Care, Volume 8 Issue 2, February-March, 2005
 MN Poison Control Center
 Health Link Online, Volume 24, Summer 2012

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