

## Seven Ways to Use Art Therapy with Your Child

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The following is guest post by **Charlotte Reznick**, a child educational psychologist and author of a new book, **The Power of Your Child's Imagination: How to Transform Stress and Anxiety into Joy and Success.**

It's often easier for a child to **talk about pictures** than about himself or his feelings (grief, anger, shame, etc.). Drawing will allow your child to express difficult feelings or to disclose what he might not share verbally.



Photo by Evythecute

Your child's artistic expression will give you a clearer sense of his inner struggle, an insight that will help you guide him.

Drawing also increases your child's awareness of his inner world and creates a window onto that landscape. In addition, a child's artwork can be a launching point for conversations that reveal her thinking about the world around her.

You don't have to be a trained therapist to do art therapy with your child. Just stock up on a variety of supplies-giant rolls of paper, colored paper, crayons, and a variety of markers, including scented, metallic, fat, thin, even markers that change color as they write over another color. Then try the following art therapy techniques to explore new ways to communicate with your child.

- **Draw a self-portrait.** On a large sheet of paper, trace your young child's body. Have her fill it in. Older children can design and complete their own. Drawing increases your child's awareness of her inner world, and it's easier to talk about a drawing than to express troubling feelings.
- **Picture the future.** Artwork is also an effective starting point when you're working with clear end-goals, like getting a good night's sleep or reducing a fear. Have your child draw two drawings-how things are now and how he'd like them to be. Kids often hang these pictures in their bedrooms to remind them of their desired direction.
- **Show and tell.** After an imaginary journey, such as a walk through a special place she imagines with her eyes shut and tells you about, have your child draw her experience. The picture gives you both something to look at and discuss. If the drawing illustrates a problem—say, a dangerous goblin or a fire at home—ask her what might solve the situation. She can even draw the solution right onto her picture.
- **Accept every drawing.** Some kids have a tough time committing their mental pictures to paper; they fear they won't measure up. Reassure your child that anything he creates is fine. Sometimes all that comes are strokes of bold color evolving out of a wonderful or terrible feeling that is finally set free on paper. Praise each one. They are the artifacts of your child's inner world.
- **Talk to the image.** Once your child has spilled his feelings on paper, he can converse with them. He might use his picture of *Fear* to ask what it needs to calm down, or to tell it to leave. It's much easier to speak to feelings when they're outside than when they're gnawing away at his tummy.
- **Take artistic action.** It's a great release when a child can draw her angry, hurt, or upset feelings, but pictures don't have to be static. She can erase part of it, or draw over it in "healing" colors with a changeable marker—an immediate transformation that feels magical. She can even rip up or throw away the paper. These actions can offer a hurting child a sense of control and satisfaction.
- **Capture the memory.** The special places your child visits on her imaginary journeys are personal healing sanctuaries. Hanging pictures of them somewhere private but visible will remind her that she can return whenever the need arises. Drawings of trusted animal friends and wizards can help her remember support is always near.