



Boundaries: The key to fostering your child's creativity

Too rigid AND too flexible

It was Day 4 of our pandemic lockdown. I was combing Pinterest to find the cutest art projects for my daughter, Sadie. I hovered to control her messes, I cut perfect circles for her to use. Mike and I laboured to ensure every project looked e-x-a-c-t-l-y like the one in the picture because if it didn't, Sadie would crumple with rage and disappointment. Her artwork was piled up in every corner of the house and hastily stuck on every wall. We started to avoid creative time altogether because it became exhausting.

Loving your kiddo and yourself at the same time

Later that night, I read a quote by writer, embodiment teacher, and conflict facilitator Prentis Hemphill that made us completely rethink how we show up for Sadie:

“Boundaries are the distance at which I can love you and me simultaneously.”

Isn't that beautiful? But here's the thing: When it comes to our kids' creativity, we parents tend to go to extremes, don't we? We say yes to all their creative inclinations (otherwise, aren't we stifling them?) or we shut most of them down (because nope to the chaos, the push-pull of trying to help them and then the flare of rage/disappointment when it doesn't go as planned, the glitter everywhere forever, the endless clean-up, and all the things).

The sweet spot – that ideal distance you're seeking between your kiddo and you – is actually somewhere in the messy middle.

Find the right distance for you...

Start by asking yourself what you actually want from your kiddo's creative time. What's the ideal scenario for you? Now I know these questions might feel weirdly selfish – isn't my kid's creativity about THEM? – but your honest answers will lead you much closer to a balance that feels right.

Don't forget to check in with your partner and other important caregivers too:

- **BIG FEELINGS:** How comfortable are you with accompanying your child through their big feelings – like boredom, frustration, and anger – which are all a natural part of their creative process? Do you find yourself rushing in with solutions or with your own frustration/anger to try to change their feelings? Can you affirm them and co-regulate with them with confidence, or not so much?
- **YOUR WHY:** What purpose do you want creative time to serve for you? Do you want that time for yourself? Do you want to use creative time for you and your child to connect? How much bandwidth do you currently have to plan, set up, and monitor/participate in their creative time?
- **PROCESS & PRODUCT:** How important is their creative process to you (their choices, their joy, their motivation)? How important is their creative product to you (i.e., following instructions, their work looking like the likely adult-completed example in the picture)?

- **MESSES:** What are your limits around creative messes? Where can you handle a mess in your home? How often could you handle their creative time on a weekly basis? What day(s) and time(s) of day would work best for you?
- **DISPLAY:** What do you want to do with their finished projects? (Think: gallery wall, scrapbook, digital album, recycling bin....) How much time and effort do you genuinely want to spend on making that happen?
- **YOUR OWN CREATIVITY:** How much time have you carved out for your own creativity in a given week? Is your kiddo's creative time the only opportunity for you to get your hands on art materials? How do you feel about that?

...and for your kiddo

Now consider where they are in their development right now:

- **BIG FEELINGS:** How comfortable are they with experiencing the boredom, frustration, and anger that bubble up during creative time (and all other times of day too)?
- **INDEPENDENCE:** Which materials can they safely use right now? Which could they use independently with a little more instruction? Which materials are unsafe for them right now?
- **NOVELTY:** Which materials would they like to use that we don't have right now? Which of those could I handle in terms of the messes or stains that they'll create? Which of those fit our budget?
- **SPACE:** Does my child have a creative "yes space"? (I'm riffing on a concept by parent educator Janet Lansbury, who says that kids thrive when they can play freely in a safe space with minimal supervision. This could be as small as a placemat or as big as a whole room.) How easily can my kiddo access their creative materials (and clean up and put them away) right now?
- **DISPLAY:** What does my child want to do with their finished work?

If they're verbal, ask them the previous questions and these too:

- **THEIR WHY:** What do you love about making art? What makes you mad, frustrated, bored when you're making art?
- **PROCESS & PRODUCT:** How much do you want to follow your heart during your creative time? How much do you just want to follow someone else's instructions?
- **CONNECTION:** Do you think it'd be fun to create and be your fabulous self around other kiddos?

Where you are & where you want to be

Take a breath and when you're ready, ask yourself: What does creativity look like in my house right now? Is it a reflection of my needs and wants AND my child's? How close are we to that ideal middle space, where my child can joyfully explore and express themselves and I can give them love, support, and some independence?

I can't map out this ideal middle space for you – this isn't a one-size-fits-all situation. But I've created Atelier Spark to be like an extension of your kitchen table:

- Our studio is a space where your child can be the boss of their own creative adventure AND connect with other curious, amazing kiddos, while a chill, trustworthy adult guides them as needed (that would be me!)
- Our playgroups and workshops are like big, exciting playdates – and you don't have to clean up! We focus on their creative experience and less on their finished creations.

- I offer monthly process art nights for parents of registered kiddos, so YOU get a chance to let loose too!

Let's create and be ourselves together! atelierspark.ca