

Access toArt

This is the first in a series of articles looking at ways to include disabled people in play and leisure activities. Where the ideas/equipment are suitable for all ages, the term “person” has been used—if it says “child” it is probably because the equipment is child-sized!

Art activities offer opportunities for self-expression, spontaneity and interaction. It is important to remember that the creative process is often more important and satisfying than an end product. Also, there are no right or wrong ways to use materials and early mark making or scribble is as valuable as representational pictures.

“Adults with disabilities hold within them a wealth of lifetime experiences, feelings and values that can be expressed and shared through art”¹

Paper

It can be interesting to paint on textured wallpaper occasionally but if we always supply scrap paper it suggests that the activity is not valued. Rolls of lining paper and sugar paper bought in bulk are both cheap ways of providing suitable paper.

Paint

Ready mixed paint is best. We can add textures or smells to different colours, to increase the sensory experience (provided we are sure that the paint is not going to be eaten).

Brushes etc.

Household paintbrushes are large and sturdy; foam pipe insulation makes the handle easier to hold. Body scrubs are easier for some people, because they can be grasped in various ways. They make interesting marks and are, of course, very washable.

A radiator brush (from DIY stores) will enable the person to reach into the centre of the table, to join in a group painting. Washing-up brushes (the type you can put liquid in the handle) make wonderful paintbrushes. Cut the panscrubber surface off carefully, with a serrated kitchen knife, to reveal



Radiator brush

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the foam sponge. The brushes are so cheap (from pound shops) that you can buy several for different paint colours. The transparent handle means that the person can see which colour they want and the angled brush is easy to hold. When the session has ended close the On/Off switch, remove and wash the foam head, and replace it ready for the next session.



Washing-up brush

Pattern Mittens (from Galt, Code N3505H, Price £22.95 plus VAT and carriage, Tel: 08451 20 30 05) are useful for children who find the texture of finger paint unpleasant. Six mittens each have a different textured surface which make interesting marks.

Ideas

Taking it in turns to use one paintbrush on a large sheet of paper encourages each person to consider the marks that others are making, and to learn about turn-taking.

Giving each person one colour enables them to see which marks they have made in the group picture.

Using fluorescent art materials can be very motivating. Paint and “sand” are available from most education or multisensory catalogues. Card and self-adhesive labels from stationers can be used for collage, highlighter pens for drawing. Fluorescent colours are eight times brighter than ordinary colours under normal light, 30 times brighter under ultraviolet light—why not do your artwork in daylight and then have a gallery viewing in the dark room!

More ideas

1. *The Art Activity Manual: A Groupwork Resource*

Marylyn Cropley, 2004, Speechmark, ISBN 0-86388431-8

2. *Crafts for All Abilities*

Sue Melville, 1997, Search Press, ISBN 0-85532-822-3

Crafts can be used as a form of therapy, to help recover forgotten skills or to boost shaky confidence²



Pattern Mittens