



Art-based activities

Art-based activities - such as drawing, painting, collages, vision boards, comic strips or digital art - are non-verbal methods that can help children and young people explore and communicate their thoughts, feelings and experiences in creative ways. These activities can also enrich more traditional verbal methods (e.g. interviews or focus groups) by making them more fun, interactive and child focussed.

The benefits of using art-based activities



Exploring experiences

- Art supports children and young people to express knowledge, attitudes, perceptions and feelings that they might struggle to convey verbally, especially when discussing sensitive or complex topics.

Emotional expression

- Drawing or creating art can help children process feelings (including traumatic experiences) and enables them to explore difficult ideas in a more comfortable medium.

Stepping stone to deeper discussion

- Children and young people can use their artwork as a visual prompt for further conversation—making interviews or focus groups more engaging and insightful.

Increased engagement

- Incorporating creative elements can transform otherwise formal or daunting research activities into fun and enriching experiences.



Keep in mind

- **Age appropriateness:** modify methods to be age appropriate. In younger children a simple drawing activity may be appropriate but older children and young people may find it childish and be less likely to engage with this method. Young people may prefer an activity using artist pens (e.g. Posca, alcohol-based markers), paints, digital art or comic strips. Younger children may be happy with simple drawing or colouring, while older ones might prefer digital art, comic strips or more advanced forms of expression. Let them choose from a range of mediums to encourage ownership and creativity.
- **Confidence with art:** some children may lack confidence with art as a form of expression and be less likely to engage with this method. Not every child or young person is confident in their artistic skills. Providing reassurance that there is no right or wrong way to create art can help reduce anxiety.
- **Supplementing with discussion:** Always speak with the child about their artwork. Their own explanation often offers crucial insights, preventing adult misinterpretations.



Planning considerations

- **Choosing art activities.** Factor in age, learning ability, skills and interest. Where possible, involve children in deciding what art-based methods to use and offer alternatives if some are reluctant.
- **Keep the end in mind.** Think about how you intend to use the artworks and their interpretations and how this aligns with your aims.
- **Format.** For example, the ‘draw-and-talk’ format involves talking about drawings with the child or young person while they are being made; the ‘draw-then-talk’ format involves talking about drawings with the child or young person after they have been made.
- **Art Equipment.** Equipment for the art, can include artist pens, crayons or pencils, paints and/or craft supplies as well as a surface use such as paper, cardboard or canvas. Try to have a selection of materials on offer so that children and young people can choose what they create their artwork with.
- Artworks or drawings can also be produced via electronic mediums (e.g. using tablets).
- **Digital Equipment.** A camera and/or scanner can be used to make a digital record of the artwork. This means that children and young people can also take their art home.



Tips for conducting art-based activities

Supporting children during the drawing activity.

- Pre-prepare prompts or instructions for you to use to guide children and young people while they draw.
- Think about how you will address or clarify any questions from the children and young people if they need further support.



Interpreting drawings

To ensure accurate meaning, drawings should always be supplemented with an explanation. Both the drawings and their interpretations can serve as valuable data for analysis.

To assist with interpretation:

- Discuss the drawing with the child, either during the creation process or afterward in an interview.
- Record and transcribe their explanation using recording equipment, transcription tools, or by taking notes and annotations



See the [Consent](#) section for considerations around consent and recognition if publishing or publicly sharing artworks.

Art-based activities can be powerful tools, opening up creative, flexible avenues for children and young people to explore and communicate their thoughts and feelings. By coupling these methods with thoughtful facilitation and ethical safeguards, you can foster richer, more nuanced engagement that honours the unique perspectives of each child.

Resources and publications

[Using Drawings and Collages as Data Generation Methods With Children: Definitely Not Child's Play](#) | Nomakhwezi Mayaba et al. (2015).

An exploration of how drawings and collages can be used as research tools with children, highlighting challenges and considerations.

[Drawing Across Media: A Cross-Sectional Experiment on Preschoolers' Drawings Produced Using Traditional Versus Electronic Mediums](#) | Kirkorian et al. (2019).

A study comparing preschoolers' drawings created using traditional materials versus electronic mediums.

[Children's drawings: evidence-based research and practice](#) | Fabris et al. (2023).

An editorial exploring the use of drawing with children and young people, with links to research and project examples that have used this methodology.

[Drawing as a Facilitating Approach When Conducting Research Among Children](#) | Søndergaard et al. (2019).

An example of a qualitative research project that utilised drawing as a method with the child participants.