

What to do with all that art?!

Your child creates so many beautiful, colourful, imaginative (and sometimes weird!) artworks, and each and every one is precious. They're almost impossible to throw away. So how can you deal with the ever-increasing piles of art overflowing the shoeboxes, and display or store them in a beautiful, meaningful way?

These five guidelines on how to care for your child's art (**CARES**) are very practical and useful:

1. **Collect:** As your child brings home or creates art, make sure you have a special collection box to put it all in. Not every piece needs to be displayed, but it should be treasured at least for a little while. Clean pizza boxes (your child can help you decorate it first!), or large plastic bins are good for this. As the art comes in, label and date it too.
2. **Admire:** Display it! You'll want to appreciate your child's art, and let them see how much you value it. Choose your favourite pieces between you, and hang them up! There are a few ideas for display below.
3. **Rest:** Let the art stay in the box for a few weeks/months at a time. Let the collection build, so that when it's time to edit, you can look through a reasonable quantity together. This will help you get a better idea of what you really want to keep, and help you see how your child's work progresses as they grow.
4. **Edit:** Go through the collection at least every season, to edit out the best pieces. This is probably the hardest part. You can keep everything if you really have to (and have the space!). No one will MAKE you throw anything out, but editing the pile down a bit will help you appreciate the special pieces that tug on your heartstrings even more. It will help you see the child development through art (there's a definite progression: from scribbles to circular scribbles, to a circle, to a giant head with little stick limbs, to a more proportioned person, to a house, to a house with a family – really interesting stuff to read about and see in your own child's work!). Editing will help make that big pile of art simply more manageable to display and store!
5. **Store:** So many different ways! How will you decide to do it? Are you keeping it for your own nostalgia? To give as gifts to your child when they're older? For their grandparents? Or just because you can't bear to throw anything away? Deciding *why* you're keeping a piece will help you decide *how* to keep it too.

When choosing pieces of your child's art, remember, it's not always about the finished product: for children, art is about the process just as much! They may choose pieces they had the most fun making, or felt a sense of achievement with when they tried a new technique. Keep the displayed art fresh, by changing it often. You might have a few cherished pieces in frames that don't change, but it's fun to keep an area free for change and recent artwork.

Here are some fun ideas for how to display your child's art:

- **The traditional 'magnets-on-the-fridge' method.** These days you can get personalized magnets made with photos of the art too!
- **Giant corkboards** and pins.
- Paint one wall of a room with **magnetic paint**, stick art to it.

- **Grid frame:** Cut a square from the most interesting sections of each piece – tack it into an ever-rotating grid of art ‘squares.’ This way you can keep a little from each painting on view.
- **Mosaic collage.** Similar to above, but a little freer – vary the shapes and sizes of the bits you cut out, and glue them to a large sheet of card. Start in the middle and work out – when the card is completely covered, you can start again!
- **Frame pieces.** Re-paint thrift store frames of different sizes and widths the same color, and hang several pieces at a time on one wall.
- **Hanging banners.** Create a hanging banner across one wall of the room with string/yarn and colorful fabric shapes and clothespins. Have extra clothespins, and attach the art to it along the way.
- **Digital Photo Frames** Take photos of the art with a digital camera, load them into a digital frame, and set it to rotate the pictures every minute or so.

After gathering all the art, and displaying certain pieces for a while, it’s time to do the big edit. You might want to do this when your child is in bed, because they will want to keep EVERYTHING. Good luck! You can edit the pile into different stacks:

- **Definite keepers, in their entirety.**
- **Art that you’d like to keep sections of – you could cut out smaller pieces to keep.**
- **Art you don’t mind cutting up or re-purposing.**
- **Art you can bring yourself to say goodbye to.**

So now you have sorted through all the art, what to do with it? I hope you find these ideas useful:

Gift it: Send artwork to relatives and friends as presents.

Reuse it: You might not want to re-purpose the very best pieces, but there are still some lovely pieces that would be a shame to just toss out!

- Recycle drawings and paintings as **gift-wrap**. You can even re-draw over the top!
- Cut colorful sections into shapes to use as **gift tags or labels**.
- Cut and paste them into **calendars**, or draw or print a calendar over the top of the art.
- Cut a stack of the same sized pieces, punch a hole through the top, and thread some yarn through to make a loop. Hang it from a hook near the fridge, and use it as a tear-through **notebook** for grocery lists, or near a phone for message taking.
- Bring a stack of light-coloured drawings or plainer paintings to the local print shop, and for \$2 or \$3, they will professionally bind them together for you. You can reuse the ‘book’ as a **colouring and drawing book**, or a notebook.

Digitalize it:

- Take photos of each artwork with a digital camera.
- Take the occasional photo of your child creating it, or holding it too.
- Make photo books of the art, one for each year, using free online sites such as shutterfly.com or Picaboo.com. These sites allow you to make customized calendars, cards, invitations, labels etc. using your own photos too.

Store it:

Don't forget to label and date your child's art!

- **Large 3-ring binders.** Use one for each year. Either use the plastic pockets, or punch holes in the art and store it in a brightly colored binder. Fold larger pieces in half.
- **Large art portfolio** from a craft store. You could decorate the portfolio with your child's help, then use it to store all the pieces flat. Make one for each year.
- **Scrapbook.** If you have the time and patience, scrapbook sections of the art!
- Bind the art into **homemade books**, one for each year. You can make this easy or hard, free or expensive... You could choose to have them bound professionally in a print shop. Or you could simply punch holes in one side of the art, and bind them together with yarn or string. A stiff piece of colored card at the front and the back will help protect the art.
- Cut out pieces of each artwork

Special Treasures:

If you have time and patience, you could also try creating a special treasure inspired by your child's art...

- Recreate your child's art using fabric: make it into a panel for a **cushion cover**. Take a favorite drawing and sketch it onto a piece of plain fabric using a fabric pencil. Sew fabric scraps and embroider the detail on top. Don't forget to embroider your child's name and the date the art was created into the corner. Use the finished 'fabric drawing' as a panel in a cushion cover, or even a quilt for the more ambitious!
- **Decoupage** a chair or table! Cut out tiny sections of each piece of art. Using Mod-Podge or similar adhesive, layer and paste them all over a chair or table or mirror frame, until it is entirely covered in art. Let it dry, then varnish over it for protection.
- **Artwork stuffies.** There are incredible fabric artists out there who will take a fantasy creature, family figure or animal from your child's drawing, and faithfully recreate it in fabric into an actual 3D cuddly! Amazing.