

Navigating Family Engagement Today

The Arts: Bringing Joy and Creating Community

Many children naturally gravitate toward “the arts.” They spontaneously sing, dance, draw, and play act with props or puppets. Others are not so comfortable but may explore with more free time.

The arts can bring a great deal of joy to participants and observers alike. Educators tell us that participating in the arts can make us smarter and exercise parts of our brains that don’t get as much use as other parts. The movements involved in dancing, singing, and acting can exercise our bodies, too! Finally, everyone can express emotions through the arts that they can’t or won’t put into words, and we may be experiencing more and a greater variety of emotions right now.

Here are some things we can do with this time at home to add the arts to our children’s lives.

- Throw a dance party! We have seen many videos of kids having dance parties online or in their neighborhoods (outside, practicing social distancing). Suggest that they organize a gathering like this with their friends (teens or tweens), or you could do it for or with them (for younger kids). If this isn’t possible, maybe your family could have a dance night in your home. Some kids are even continuing their ballet or other dance lessons online.
- It was truly heartwarming to see quarantined Italians stand at their open windows and sing together. Our homes may not lend themselves to this, but technology can bring people together to sing. Alternatively, like the dance party in the neighborhood, people could stand in their front yards or on their porches and sing together. Finally, your family could gather and sing (with or without a piano, guitar, or other instrument) just for fun like in the “olden days.”
- Do enough of your family members play instruments that you could have a family jam session? Again, what about doing this via the Internet, in the front yard, or on the phone?
- Some kids love to put on skits or plays for their families. This time at home could allow you to give them more attention and an audience. You could help your kids create some puppets out of stuff you have around the house and encourage them to put on a puppet show for the family. You could even record or stream these productions for distant friends or family members.
- Encourage your children to draw. Many children draw constantly (even when they are supposed to be doing schoolwork), so lean into their creativity! Consider asking every member of the family to make a thematic drawing each week (e.g. What would you be doing this week if you weren’t quarantined? What are you worried about right now? What do you most want to do when the quarantine is over?) and then have an art show at the end of the quarantine to celebrate. You might even invite family and friends, provide refreshments, and make it a real party!

As the great artist, Pablo Picasso, said: “Every child is an artist. The problem is to remain an artist once we grow up.”
