



04

FREE RESOURCE

Art as a Feelings Language

How to read what your child is making, and what to say when they show you.

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Why children speak in colour and mark before they speak in words

Before a child has the language to say "I feel overwhelmed" or "I am scared of what comes next," their hands reach for the paint. This is not metaphor. It is developmental neuroscience.

The limbic system, the emotional centre of the brain, develops significantly earlier than the prefrontal cortex, which governs language and verbal expression. Children feel before they can articulate what they feel. Art provides a channel for what words cannot yet carry.

"Some children arrive at Mini Ivy carrying things they do not have words for yet. Then something happens. They pick up a brush. They push paint across paper. They make something that is entirely theirs. And slowly, they open up."

Valando Demetriou, Co-Founder, Mini Ivy Art Studio

FOR ALL CHILDREN

Every child uses art as an emotional outlet, regardless of whether they are "artistic." The expression is the point, not the aesthetics of the outcome.

FOR CHILDREN UNDER PRESSURE

Children experiencing anxiety, transition, or stress show particularly significant shifts in behaviour through consistent structured creative expression over time.

This guide is not a diagnostic tool. It is a lens. It will help you look at what your child makes and listen to what they are telling you through it. And it will give you language to respond in a way that keeps that channel open.

Reading marks, colour, and pressure

You do not need to be an art therapist to read your child's art. You need to know what to look for, and how to stay curious rather than diagnostic. The distinction matters enormously.

Pressure

Heavy, dark marks pressed hard into the paper.

Often associated with strong, unprocessed emotion: anger, frustration, or intense excitement. Do not interpret this negatively. It is often a sign of healthy emotional release through a safe channel. Notice it, stay curious, and do not comment on it directly.

Marks

Very faint, small, careful marks in a corner of the page.

Can signal anxiety, withdrawal, or uncertainty. This is not a diagnosis. It is a signal to invite gently rather than push. "I notice you are working very carefully today. Is there anything on your mind?" is enough.

Colour

A sudden shift toward exclusive dark colour use.

Context matters enormously here. A child who is engaged and happy may simply love dark colours. A sudden, sustained shift, especially alongside other behavioural changes, is worth noticing and gently exploring.

Repetition

The same figures, scenes, or symbols appearing across multiple artworks.

Repetition in children's art often reflects something they are processing. The work is not the therapy, but it is an invitation to a conversation. Follow the image, not your interpretation of it.

THE GOLDEN RULE

Never tell a child what their art means. Ask what it means to them. Your interpretation closes the door. Their description opens it.

What to say, and what never to say

The way you respond to your child's art in the first few seconds shapes whether they bring you the next one. These scripts keep the creative channel open.

WHEN THEY SHOW YOU THEIR ARTWORK

Avoid: ~~"Oh that is beautiful! / What is it? / Is that a house?"~~

"Tell me about this." Then wait. Fully.

"What is it?" implies there should be something recognisable, and can make children feel their abstract expression was wrong. "Tell me about it" invites story, meaning, and pride without any judgement attached.

WHEN THEY SEEM UPSET WHILE CREATING

Avoid: ~~"Don't be upset / Let me fix it / Start it again"~~

"I can see this one is feeling tricky. Do you want to keep going, or start something new?"

Choice is regulating. It restores a sense of control in a moment where the child feels out of it. Both options are valid. Neither is abandonment of the work.

WHEN THEY SAY "IT IS RUINED" OR "I HATE IT"

Avoid: ~~"It is not ruined! It is wonderful!"~~

"What happened to it that you do not like? Is there anything you could do to it that might feel better?"

Taking their observation seriously teaches them that their perception matters. "Ruined" is just the beginning of a new creative decision, not the end of the work.

WHEN YOU NOTICE SOMETHING REPEATED IN THEIR ART

Avoid: ~~"You always draw that. What does it mean?"~~

"I notice you have been drawing this a lot lately. I love seeing it. Is there a story that goes with it?"

Curiosity without pressure. You are holding space for them to share if they are ready, without interrogating meaning they may not yet have words for.

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Art is not what your child makes. It is what your child is becoming.

At Mini Ivy, every guided art session is a developmental experience, not a craft project. Our educators hold space for children to express, process, and grow through structured creative experience. Come and see what happens when children are truly met where they are.

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