

FEELINGS INSPECTORS RESOURCE

Empathy

Paint Your Partner's Feelings

About this activity

This activity is all about putting deliberate effort into understanding another person's feelings and so experiencing empathy in a very conscious way. Our Feelings Inspectors' own comments showed that they understood the value of expressing emotions through art, especially if those emotions are difficult to express in words.

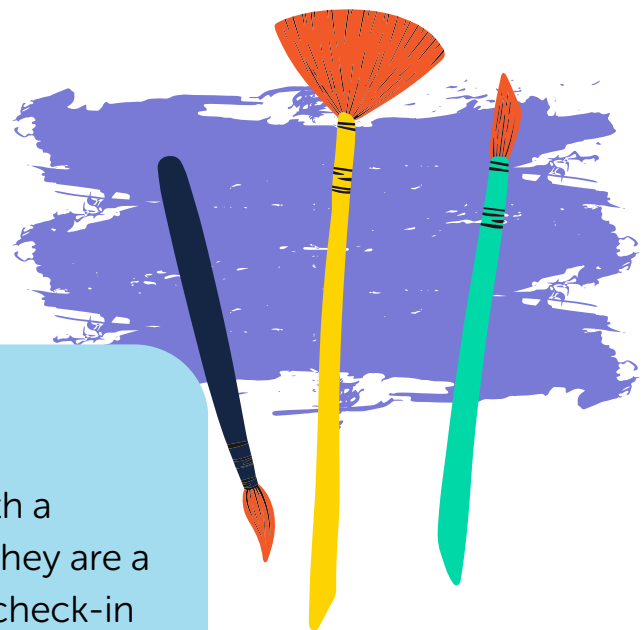
What do we need?

- Paper
- Watercolour paints
- Brushes
- Pencils

Check-in

At Children's Parliament, we start every session with a check-in. Children love these short activities, and they are a vital piece of our rights-based practice. Choose a check-in using our [Feelings Inspectors Check-in Kit](#).

“
It felt really good
because now you can
open up to that
person instead of
having to bottle up
everything
”

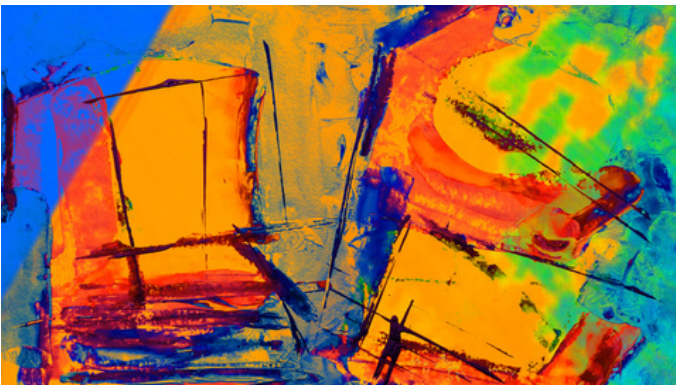


Paint your partner's feelings

Instructions

Explain that today we're going to be doing some abstract painting. Ask the children if they can explain what abstract art is. If they require a definition, explain that it is a style of painting where you're not trying to show something you can see as it really is. Instead, you use colour and shape to try to represent an idea or a feeling.

At this point, it may be helpful to show the children some abstract paintings and ask them what emotions they think they can see. This can be a good way of making it clear that there can be different interpretations of colour and shape and that they can express themselves freely in the activity that follows. Examples of abstract art can be found below.



Paint your partner's feelings

Ask the children to find a space in the room and close their eyes. Guide them through the following exercise. You can use this text as a script:

- Think of a memory that had a strong emotion attached to it – one that you're comfortable sharing with the group. It could be any emotion at all – a time you felt really happy, sad, angry, excited, nervous etc.
- Imagine yourself back in that moment. Think about where you are and what you can see. Think about the people who are there with you – what were they doing?
- Did they have anything to do with how you were feeling?
- Now think about the feeling you experienced. What caused it? How did it feel in your body? How does it feel to remember that moment now?
- Spend some time sitting and thinking about that particular moment. Think about how you would describe it to someone who wasn't there. What details have stuck in your mind?
[Pause and give the children some time at this point].
- Now think about any colours that come to mind when you think about this memory and those feelings. Remember the colours you think of but don't tell anyone yet – we'll talk about that at the end of the session.

Explain that the children will work in pairs and take it in turns to describe that memory and how it made them feel. The other person in the pair, the child who is listening, will create a 'feelings painting' – this can be completely abstract or, if they prefer, represent what they're being told. The children may prefer to both paint at the same time and so the recounting of the memories can be more conversational. Give the children at least 45 minutes uninterrupted painting time. If they finish their painting earlier and would like another activity, you can suggest that they paint their own feelings picture based on the same memory so that they can compare it with their friend's interpretation.

Paint your partner's feelings

Allow some time at the end for the children to show each other their pictures and to reflect on what the experience had been like for them:

What did it feel like trying to represent someone else's feelings?

What did it feel like to try to explain those feelings to the other person?

Did your partner choose the same colours that you thought about when you were thinking about the memory earlier?

How do the colours or brush strokes convey the feelings?

“

If you're both feeling sad, you can both help each other.

”

“

Ours are chaos, because there's loads of feelings and your brain's not sure what's going on.

”

Allowing the conversation to meander away from the memories into anything related while the children paint should allow for the topic to be explored in an organic way.

Top tip

A mindful moment

At Children's Parliament, we end every session with a mindful moment to reflect on the session and wind-down. Choose a mindful moment using our [Feelings Inspectors Mindful Moment Kit](#).