

Examples of Activities in our Curriculum at Both Learning Labs: Children's Medical Center and Booker T. Washington Learning Center

Tie Dye Snowflakes/Stars:

Materials: Coffee filters (large round), food coloring, scissors, paper towels.



Papers were folded a number of ways and then cut to create snowflake/star cutouts. The papers were then placed in water briefly and then placed between dry towels to absorb excess water, so that they were not dripping water. We used food coloring then to color the snowflakes/stars. We discussed the mixing of colors...what happens when the red runs into the yellow. We made them wishing stars for some children. For some children, using scissors wasn't possible so they just put the drops of color on damp filters/paper towels. Once dry, they could be embellished with drawings, glitter, etc. Children had their own creations to decorate their rooms and to send wishes home to family.

Lessons Learned: One drop of coloring went a long way. Food coloring may be too expensive for an on-going program so water color paints in tubes could be used as a substitute. They would need to be watered down but could be put in small plastic bottles with needle nose tips. Plastic baggies over small hands helped to keep them clean. If there were syringes available (without needles), that could be a non-threatening way for a child to use an item that is used in treatment. They could then be used much like an eye dropper extracting the color from a small container. Reusable trays or disposable paper plates that have a sealed surface could be used to contain the workspace and make for easy clean-up. This would also make it portable to a room if a child was unable to leave their bed. And now there are glow-in-the-dark paints that could be used once the star is dry. These could be added to the star and they would then glow at night as a child goes to sleep.

String Paint:

Materials: String or yarn approximate 12 inches in length, containers of poster paint, colored construction paper.

The string is placed in the poster paint leaving an end exposed and free of paint.

Fold the construction paper in half like a book; then open the folded paper. The strings that are in the paint containers are then pulled out with some paint on them and placed on half of the paper. They can be laid over one another in any pattern but recommend that no more than 2 strings be used at one time. The paper then is closed. An extra pair of hands is needed to hold the "book" closed as the strings are slowly pulled out of the construction paper "book". This creates a unique feathering affect, mixing of colors and texture then on both sides of the folded paper. For some children, we likened this as part of their process of healing and having "stitches removed" and how beautiful they would be.



Link to Inviting Dialogue: We would play games of asking what the patterns suggested. What does it make you think of? Could it be how your surgery is healing? Could it be the love your friends and family

are sending to help you recover or your doctors and nurses working to help you regain perfect health? Maybe it is fear of the unknown? When children see abstract designs and are invited to share what they see in the design, often they begin to talk about their fears, hopes, questions, concerns and our team would listen, reflect with Active Listening, asking more open-ended questions and gently encouraging the flow of thoughts being shared by the child. The medical team (which included social psychologists) helped us learn how to be most helpful in this part of our process. We always invite children to share what their art work suggests to them and in the case of children at risk and in situations where there is fear and the unknown of medical procedures, this became very powerful as a strategy to help each child open up, feel heard and be able to process fears, hopes and concerns.

Finger Paint

Materials: Liquid starch in the bottle (not spray), poster paint, plastic trays (like those found in a cafeteria) and paper, small gloves for the children or hand-wipe towels for cleaning painted hands.



A few tablespoons of starch are placed on the tray and poster paint is added. Children can then "finger paint" and make their design on the tray. Paper can then be placed on the design in the tray and the design is then transferred to the paper.

Once the finished piece is transferred to paper the child is invited to comment on what they see, feel or imagine. These stories often open an inner door to repressed feelings. For example, we might hear, "This is my loneliness wishing my mother didn't have to work two jobs so she could be here with me." "This is my leg angry with me and my bicycle for riding so fast and making it break. It hurts and it wishes I hadn't made it hurt. It is afraid it will never be the same again." "This is my blood mixing with the medicine and taking it to my infection so I can get well."

Sometimes, with the permission of the child, we printed their stories on cards and posted them beneath their art work. Then matted both on a larger piece of colored matt paper so they could hang their work in a gallery in the art room or in their room. If the story was an intimate revelation we would keep it private but this was the choice of the child. Sometimes they wanted their story to be posted and this opened a deeper conversation with family members. We always consulted with the on-site medical team to guide us through this decision.

Sack and Sock Puppets

Materials: Paper sacks or socks, glue, yarn, buttons, colored paper, scissors, fabric, felt, glitter, jewels.

This was always a success because kids just love making puppets and they were drawn to this art activity. This was a wonderful activity because it was also one that was portable to hospital rooms of children unable to leave their room/bed. The children would make a puppet friend ...this could be a representation of a real family member or friend, or it could be a favorite pet. Sometimes it represented the child itself, possibly being a "healthy" person or could be the personality which could express concerns or fears that the child might be hesitant to express openly. This was also an opportunity for the children to actively interact sharing supplies but also having their puppet "do the talking". These



were colorful expressions by the children who would go back to the room with them and could share with family and hospital staff.

Body Outline Drawings

Materials: Butcher paper or a large roll of paper the approximate size or larger of the child, felt tip markers, glue, yarn, beads, buttons, colored paper, scissors, cloth scraps, tissue paper, crayons. Also, if available, bandages, and cotton balls.



The basic activity would have the paper on the floor and the child would lie on the paper while their body outline is drawn by someone else. This would be the method we would use for the more able children, but could be modified by taping the paper to the wall and having the child stand in front of the paper while the outline is drawn. This activity could also be modified so that children in wheelchairs could be “wheeled” in place. I remember doing an outline of a boy who had a large cast on his leg and he seemed determined to have that cast included in his outline. Once the outline was completed, the children were able to draw, tape, color and glue items to their outline. Some made their image of themselves very realistic and talked about the treatment they were having. They include bandages, cotton balls, and gauze. Sometimes veins and arteries were shown with yarn. But many times the resilience of the child was

demonstrated and they made their body outline one of health and hope for healing. One time we were fortunate to have a nurse in the room and she did her body outline and this just tickled the children in the activity room. This was a time for them to see their nurse in a “fun” way; participating in an activity with them. Nurses many times may be a reminder of threatening experiences such as administering medicine, a shot or other treatment, which can be a scary and painful experience. In this instance, the children could associate the nurse with something fun that they were doing. This was also an activity that could then be taken to their room and the kids could continue to work on their life-size picture. The images were usually ones of how they saw themselves in the hospital or how they wanted to be once back in their homes with family, at school with friends or active in sports and playing with friends.

Stained Glass

Note: This activity requires adult supervision and assistance in the process of creating the stained glass window hangings.

Materials: Grated crayons (a rotary cheese grater similar to ones used in restaurants for parmesan cheese can be found in thrift stores), wax paper, newspaper and an iron. Also scissors, tape, colored construction paper.

Prep before the activity: Multiple crayons of the same color are grated and placed in zip-lock bags or containers with tops. We usually did primary colors as well as bright crayons such as pink, lime green, orange, etc. Wax paper is cut in approximate 12 inch lengths; this was an easy size to manage. We highly recommend doing a few practice runs of this activity so that you know how the materials respond to each other and the heat.



A sheet of wax paper is placed on a few sheets of newspaper on the workspace for the child. The child could then pick grated crayon colors and sprinkle on the wax paper. This could be done very randomly or in a pattern or design. Once the child has completed this part, another piece of wax paper is placed over the grated crayon creating a “sandwich”. The adult then would move the newspaper/wax paper stack over to another work area, where an iron has been set up at a very low temperature. Caution must be taken; if the iron is too hot, it will heat the grated crayon colors too fast and the colors will be muddy. Place a few more sheets of newspaper over the “sandwich” and iron quickly and carefully, checking to see how the colors are melting.

After a few seconds to cool, separate the newspaper from each side of the wax paper/crayon sandwich. Allow to cool completely....this may take a minute or two. This creates a colored transparency that then can be cut to a shape or framed in colored paper like a window. These are great taped to a window where the colors can be seen. Many times this activity was just to explore how the colors blended....for example asking, “What colors did you make by mixing these?” But it was also a way to decorate a child’s room with “stained glass” flowers or clouds.

Name Mirror Cut-Outs

Materials: colored papers, scissors, glue, items to decorate such as stickers, glitter, yarn, colored markers, etc.

Fold colored paper long-ways in half. The name of a child or parent was written on colored paper just above the fold using a colored marker or crayon. The name is then cut out leaving a border around the letters. Once the name was cut out, it could then be glued to a larger piece of paper and then decorated. Many times this was a way for the child to make their own name plate for their room. It would be a way for them to be recognized in a much more exciting and personal way than just the standard computer-generated name plate. These are very simple illustrations which hopefully convey the process better visually.

