



# Safety in the Arts

**T**aking part in arts and crafts projects is an enjoyable and popular activity for many children. However, parents and caregivers should be aware that art materials may contain hazardous substances that can cause permanent health damage and even death. Research has shown that children are physiologically more susceptible than adults to toxic substances, which can be inhaled, ingested or absorbed through the skin. Therefore, children should only work with materials and processes known to be safe.

Examine the labels of all arts and crafts materials carefully to see whether they contain hazardous substances. The federal government's Hazardous Products Act requires cautionary labelling on hazardous chemical products sold to consumers. The labelling includes hazard symbols, statements about the nature of the hazard, precautionary measures and first aid treatments. Use of the term non-toxic is misleading because it applies only to acute (immediate) poisoning. Non-toxic products should be treated with the same caution as any chemical product.

It's a good idea to use art materials that bear the CP Certified Products Seal and/or the AP Approved Products Seal of the (American) Art and Craft Materials Institute. If the label does not provide enough information, contact the manufacturer to find out what substances are used in its products and if a Material Safety Data Sheet is available. Children should not eat or drink while working on arts and crafts projects. As well, they should not use art materials that will aggravate any allergies or existing health conditions. Supervise art activities to make sure safe practices are being followed and that all materials are safely stored away when not in use.

The adjacent table summarizes some of the art materials that to avoid and lists safe substitutes. In an emergency, immediately contact the nearest poison control centre and keep the toxic product nearby for label information.

AVOID	USE
Powdered clay. It is easily inhaled and contains silica and possibly asbestos. Do not sand dry clay pieces or engage in other dust-producing activities.	Talc-free, premixed clay. After using clay, wet mop or sponge surfaces thoroughly.
Ceramic glazes or copper enamels.	Water-based paints instead of glazes. Adults may water-proof pieces with shellac or varnish.
Cold-water, fibre-reactive dyes or other chemical-based commercial dyes.	Vegetable and plant dyes (such as onion skins, or tea) as well as food dyes.
Instant papier mâchés, which create inhalable dust and may contain lead or asbestos.	Make papier mâché from black and white newspapers and library or white paste.
Powdered tempera paints, which create inhalable dust and may contain toxic pigments.	Liquid tempera paints or paints an adult pre-mixes.
Pastels, chalks or dry markers that create dust.	Oil pastels, crayons or dustless chalks.
Solvents such as turpentine, toluene and rubber cement thinner. Also avoid solvent-containing materials such as solvent-based inks, alkyd paints and rubber cement.	Water-based products only
Aerosol sprays.	Water-based paints with brushes or spatter techniques.
Epoxy, instant glue, airplane glue or other solvent-based adhesives.	Water-based white glue or library paste.
Permanent felt tip markers which may contain toxic solvents.	Water-based markers only.
Casting plaster. Besides creating dust, casting body parts can result in serious burns.	Adults can mix plaster in ventilated area or outdoors for sand casting and other safe projects.