

ages
2-3

Coloring outside the lines

Look at it this way: At least he's still on the paper!

Q My son scribbles all over his coloring books. I think he should learn to stay within the lines, but my husband believes that'll stifle his creativity. Who's right?

A He is. While coloring is an excellent way for young children to develop finger and wrist dexterity and good hand-eye coordination, staying inside the lines offers no advantages, says Sandra Fisher, assistant professor of early-childhood education at Kutztown University, in Kutztown, PA. "It's actually developmentally inappropriate to urge children this age to color in the lines,

since they don't have fine motor control yet."

In fact, it's a good idea to alternate the coloring books with blank paper. Freehand doodling will not only enhance your child's fine motor skills, it will give him a sense of autonomy and another way to communicate. "Children express themselves more freely in their drawings, especially if they still have limited vocabularies," says Fisher.

As long as your son is attempting some representational drawing (i.e., family, a pet, or a tree) by age 4, he's right on track—even if he has his own style of covering his coloring-book pages.

WHAT TO SAY WHEN...

The playdate's over

"It's time to make up a great ending for your game."

"We're leaving in two minutes. Play with your favorite toy!"

"Make your silliest faces at each other as we walk out."

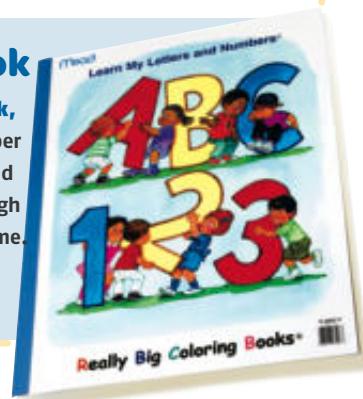
"Can you be out the door before your pal counts to ten?"

"Let's make a date to play again and mark it with a star on the calendar."

—DEBBIE GRANICK

King-size coloring book

With the **ABC 123 Really Big Coloring Book**, your child will have nearly five square feet per page—covered with whimsical characters and objects—to scribble on. Bonus: It's big enough for a friend or sib to work on at the same time. Available in five additional themes. (\$8; mead.com)



Mom Tip! "I scrub down the kitchen sink, then give my toddler safe items to 'wash'—funnels, plastic spoons. He goes at it for almost an hour at a time." —MARY ROSE ALMASI, SOMERS, NY