

CT-MMB.700

PASSING ON NEEDLEWORK SKILLS TO YOUNG PEOPLE

Why should we pass needlework skills on to young people? Don't they have enough to do with school, sports, music lessons, TV, and video games? And besides, it's so easy to buy needle crafted items at the store—the ones imported from overseas. Before you answer these questions, think about why you enjoy doing needlework yourself.

We live in an age of technology and because of this, many parents have failed to see the importance of teaching handwork to their children. Family sociology has changed, families are spread out across the country, and the tradition of passing heritage skills from one generation to the next has almost been lost. Thankfully, the needle arts are experiencing a renewal, and many adults are learning the skills that were abandoned when they were growing up.

Needlework includes knitting, crochet, quilting, embroidery, needlepoint, tatting/lacework, and rug making. Simply put, it is handwork that requires some sort of needle or tool and thread or yarn to create an item of decorative or practical use. The benefits of teaching young people needlework are numerous. Handwork develops focus and concentration. It encourages following a process in order to complete a project. It enhances critical thinking and math skills. It increases hand/eye coordination, small motor skills, and builds self-esteem. Moreover, it provides a means to promote healthy, interpersonal relationships between adults and children. Studies show that young people are less likely to engage in risky behaviors when they are bonded to trusted adults.¹

Pointers for successfully working with young people

Patience is the key when it comes to working with children. Most young children have short attention spans and like to be entertained. Be aware that fine motor skills among children vary among individuals. It is important to keep the experience *fun*! Stressing too much on perfection will surely lose their interest. Work around mistakes at first and take pleasure in the fact that the children are trying. Encouragement and praise keeps children (and adults) from giving up, even if little has been accomplished. Listen with your ears and your eyes. Be open to the young person and sensitive to the young person's feelings and abilities.

Quality one-on-one time is the ultimate goal. Learning the needlework skill is the bonus with the hope that the young person will grow to love it and in turn pass the skill on to the next generation.

What to teach

When children see adults doing activities that they enjoy, they are naturally curious about learning to do the same. Sharing your joy in doing needlework will be contagious. If you don't think you know enough to teach, continue to practice. All you need to do is to stay one step ahead of the child. You learn by doing — which goes for both the teacher and the student. To begin, choose a simple project that concentrates on teaching one technique. Since attention spans are short, limit lesson time so you don't lose the child's interest. Oftentimes beginner kits that are designed for young people can be found at craft stores. Projects that can be completed in a minimal amount of time are fun and can be given as treasured gifts. Some simple projects as well as resources are found at the end of this publication.

When are children capable of doing needlework?

Children as young as 5 years old can begin to acquire needlework skills. Pre-knitting activities include finger knitting or finger-crocheted chains. Spool knitting creates knitted cords without the need to manipulate needles. Straight stitching on 1/4-inch gingham fabric is a good way to introduce simple embroidery skills, and plastic canvas can be used to teach beginning needlepoint skills.

Knitting with two needles may be introduced next. It may be helpful to pre-cast stitches onto needles and knit several rows before handing off the knitting to the child. Start with yarn that is at least worsted weight or even a bulky weight. Fatter needles that are 10 inches or shorter in length are easiest for little hands to use.

As with any type of needlework, be sure the child can see how you do it. This may mean sitting on the floor with the child in your lap. If it is appropriate, let the child put his or her hands on yours as you stitch/knit. Have samples of finished items to motivate them to complete their project.

Crochet requires the ability to control yarn tension on one hand and to recognize stitch locations. Eight- to nine-year-olds should be able to begin crocheting with a hook. As with knitting, you should start with using a solid, light colored, worsted or bulky weight yarn and size H or larger hook.

Using a needle and thread to embroider on fabric comes next. Again, it is best to begin with using a larger needle and either pearl cotton or six-strand embroidery floss. Using felt or burlap to introduce basic stitches will eliminate the need for an embroidery hoop. After the basics are learned, move on to lighter weight fabric and floss, and a smaller needle. Cross stitch on gingham is a good method to introduce counted stitching.

Older children—those 12 and up—will pick up skills related to all types of needlework. Hand quilting, needlepoint, and tatting require good control over fine motor skills and will be appropriate for this age.

Why?

Now we can answer the question of why pass needlework skills on to young people.

- ❖ It is a part of our heritage. Since the Renaissance, needle arts have been passed on from one generation to another.
- ❖ It gives you the opportunity to spend quality time with a young person.
- ❖ It gives youth a practical, useful, and fun activity. Working with our hands brings all three major faculties together—head, heart, and hands.
- ❖ It offers opportunities to share with others in the community by stitching for charities such as:
 - ♦ *Warm up America!* is a foundation that coordinates the efforts of volunteers who knit and crochet afghans to help those in need. www.warmupamerica.com
 - ♦ Precious Pals Program gives dressed-up bears to children across the country who are facing crisis. This program is sponsored by the Knitting Guild of America. <http://www.tkga.com/pals.html>

Quick Projects

The following projects are suggestions to use in teaching beginning needlework skills. Projects are listed in a progressive order with the easiest being first and the last one being the most difficult and for older youth. Before trying to teach, be sure to do the project first and have a sample to show the young person being instructed. Remember to choose projects that you are successful and comfortable in doing.

SPOOL KNITTING

There are “Knitting Knobbies” for sale in craft stores and catalogs. To make one, take a large wooden craft spool and drive 4 small nails, equally spaced around the top. The head of each nail should be up $\frac{1}{2}$ inch from the spool top. Number each nail: 1, 2, 3, and 4 according to the diagram. Tie a slip knot, leaving a tail approximately 4 inches long. Place the slip knot over nail no. 1 and insert tail through the hole of the spool. Wrap yarn around nail no. 2, then no. 3, then no. 4. Hold spool and yarn in the left hand and a small crochet hook in the right hand. Pass yarn across nail above previous loops, working from right to left. Insert crochet hook from outside into lower loop on nail no.1 and bring it up and over second yarn and nail head. Continue moving around to the left in this manner. As stitches are formed, pull gently on the tail to keep them even. The knitted cord will gradually come through the spool's center. To bind off, take the last stitch worked and move it to the nail to the left. Insert crochet hook in lower loop and bring up and over nail. Repeat until one stitch remains. Cut yarn and draw end through last loop to finish.

To join yarns in the middle or change colors, simply tie ends together and tuck ends into center of cord as you knit.

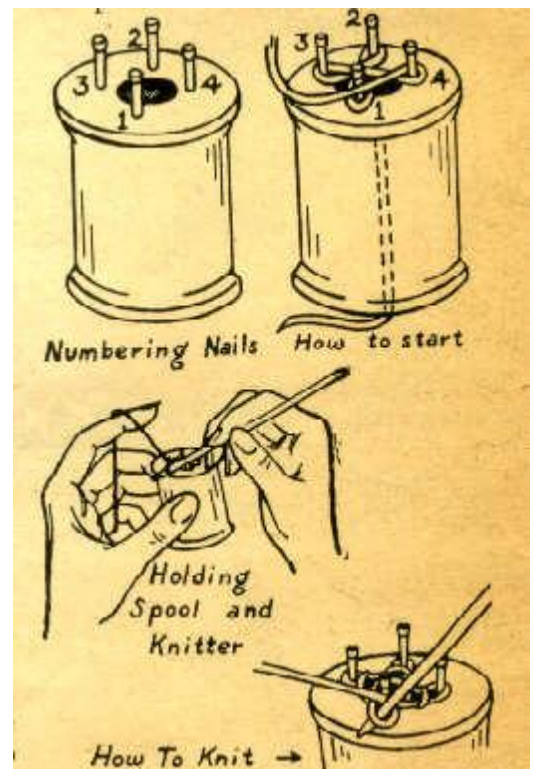


Diagram compliments of <http://www.knitting-crochet.com>

EASY BOOKMARK TO KNIT OR CROCHET (allow child to do as much as he or she can)

Materials: Approximately 1 ounce of worsted weight yarn
Size 8, straight 10-inch knitting needles **OR** size H crochet hook

Knit instructions: Cast on 8 stitches.
Knit every row for 46 or approximately 6 to 8 inches.
Bind off all stitches.

Crochet instructions: Chain 21 stitches loosely.
Turn single crochet in each chain (20) across, chain 1 for turn
stitch.
Repeat four more times.
Cut yarn and pull through last chain stitch.

Fringe instructions: Cut eight 8-inch lengths of yarn.
Fold strand in half and loop ends through each stitch/row across each
short end.
Trim ends even.

COASTERS (allow child to do as much as he or she can)

Materials: Worsted weight cotton yarn
Size 8, 10-inch knitting needles **OR** size H crochet hook **OR** plastic
canvas and large tapestry needle

Knit instructions: Cast on 20 stitches, Knit 30 rows. Bind off. Cut yarn and weave in yarn
ends.

Crochet instructions: (Granite Stitch) Chain 20, single crochet in 2nd chain from hook,
chain 1, single crochet in 2nd chain, continue across ending with
chain 2. Turn.
Single crochet in 1st chain space, *chain 1, single crochet in next
chain space*, continue across row ending with chain 2. Turn.
Repeat previous row until you have 18 rows. Cut yarn and weave in
yarn ends.

Plastic canvas instructions: Cut plastic canvas to measure 5 inches square. Show child
how to do the tent stitch to cover canvas area and complete
by whip stitching around outside edges. Weave in yarn ends.

EMBROIDERED PILLOW

Materials: ½ yard gingham fabric (¼ inch check)
½ yard white cotton flannel fabric (to prevent thread shadowing)
Embroidery floss
Embroidery needle
Embroidery hoop
Sewing thread
Scissors
Lead pencil
Graph paper
Pillow form or fiberfill to stuff pillow

Instructions:

1. Using graph paper, create a design using cross-stitches and straight stitches (example: child's name).
2. Using a lead pencil, copy design onto gingham fabric.
3. Hoop flannel-backed gingham in embroidery hoop.
4. Let child embroider design.
5. Cut back for pillow.
6. With right sides together, sew back to pillow front, leaving an opening to stuff or insert pillow form.
7. Turn right sides out and have child stuff his or her pillow.
8. Sew opening closed.

QUILTED HOT PAD

Materials: 100 percent cotton fabric scraps
Cotton batting
Quilting thread, needle and thimble

Instructions:

1. Cut nine 2½ inch squares of cotton fabric.
2. Cut one piece of cotton batting 6 inches square.
3. Cut backing fabric 7½ inches square.
4. Show child how to sew the small squares together to create a nine-patch block.
5. Press.
6. Center batting and nine-patch block on backing fabric. Pin together.
7. Fold backing edges up and over front of nine-patch, mitering corners.
8. Pin backing to quilt block around edges and show child how to stitch binding in place.
9. Child can quilt hot pad within each square.

TATTED FLORAL NOTE CARDS²

Tatting is very tedious and should not be attempted until after the youth has done other types of needlework and is skilled at controlling yarn/thread tension with his or her fingers.

Materials: Cotton crochet thread, tatting shuttle, plain note card, white glue, green marker pen.

Abbreviations used: r - ring

ds - double stitch

p - picot

cl - close ring

Instructions:

1. Wind shuttle
2. Make r of 4 ds, p, 3 ds, p, ds, p, 3 ds, p, 4ds, cl r. Repeat 2 times.
3. Hide the beginning and ending threads.
4. Repeat for additional flowers.
5. Arrange the flowers on note cards and draw stems and leaves with green marker. Glue flowers in place.



Resources for further instructions and information:

- ❖ *Complete Guide to Needlework*, Reader's Digest Association, Inc., 2002.
- ❖ *Keeping 4-H in Stitches* – Kentucky 4-H Needlework Project Notebook, 2004.
- ❖ **World Wide Web** – enter individual needlework categories using online search engine.
- ❖ Local library
- ❖ Craft/yarn shops and catalogs

¹Risk and Protective Factors, 1992. "Risk-Focused Prevention" University of Washington, School of Social Work, Social Development Research Group; Oregon State Department of Human Resources office of Drugs and Alcohol Abuse.

²Tatting pattern by Elaine Clift, County Agent for Family and Consumer Sciences, taken from *Keeping 4-H in Stitches* - Kentucky 4-H Needlework Project, 2004.

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February 2005; revised July 2012

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