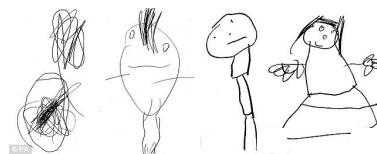


Early Mark Making



In nursery we call the children's writing 'early mark making'. This is a stage when children are 'experimenting' and their mark making and drawings are their way of communicating.

'Writing' is not just about holding a pencil and correctly forming letters it is a skill that children have to learn gradually.

What can we do to help?

- Be interested in your child's mark making and drawing, talk about what has been written or drawn.
- Provide writing materials e.g. pencils, pens, crayons, chalks, paint and paper. E.g. rolls of old wallpaper.
- Model the writing process- write with your child, e.g. a shopping list, a greeting card, a message.
- Talk about 'environmental print'- print you see all around us e.g. road signs on the way home, shop signs, posters, bus timetables.
- Share books/ magazines or newspapers together.
- Try not to keep correcting your child's handwriting or worry about how it looks.
- Do not worry about how your child holds a pencil.
- Be patient, give your child time and support.
- The most important thing is not to make your child write if he/she does not want to!
- Remember it is a developmental process and your child will write when he/she is ready.



How do children develop their mark making skills?

Learning to write is very much a physical skill. Before your child can control the muscles in their hands they need to control their large, whole body movements. This is called 'gross motor skills'.

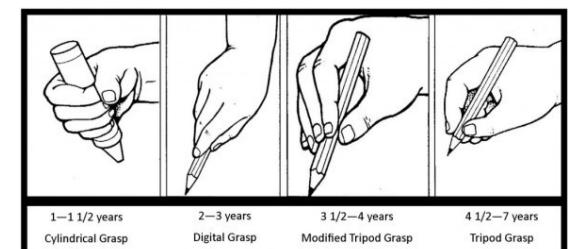


Also your child will have to develop their hand eye co-ordination and their small muscles in their fingers to actually be able to hold and use a pen/pencil with control. This is called 'fine motor skills'.



Developing the pencil grip.

- Developing the pencil grip, referred to as a tripod grip, also takes time.
- Children need to develop the strength in their hands, fingers and wrists.
- They need to be able to move their fingers separately, using their thumb and index finger.
- Their wrists and thumb need to be strong.
- Finally they need to learn to rest their wrist on a table and to use their non-dominant hand to hold the paper still.
- To actually successfully write, the side of the hand needs to slide along the paper too!



1. Children enjoy exploring what pencils, crayons and chalk do. Here a child may grip a pencil/crayon in the palm of the hand and make lots of random marks that an adult might describe as scribbling!



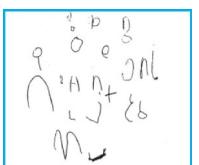
2. Here the writing has developed a little more and the child attempts to make shapes and lines. The child may have begun to hold a pencil in a more usual way.



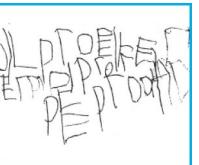
3. Children imitate adults writing moving quickly across the page from left to right and working from top to the bottom. At this stage a child may be using either hand to hold a pencil and write.



4. A child may randomly combine symbols with letters to write a message. Here a child is only just beginning to understand that writing and drawing are different and that writing has meaning!



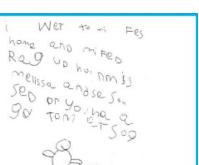
5. Here the child knows some letters shapes and uses them to convey meaning.



6. At this stage the child knows some letter shapes and sounds of letters and uses them to represent words.



7. At this stage the child knows that words are spelt in a particular way and when it is not sure of a spelling he/she will use letters that sound right.



Activities to develop the physical skills

- Play dough - pinching, squeezing, with thumb and forefinger, poking, rolling, squeezing.
- Threading - beads, pasta ,straws, buttons
- Picking up small objects using the thumb and index finger, learning to use tweezers and pipettes or small eye droppers. Count dried peas into a pot or post pennies into a money box or use inset puzzles.



- Finger rhymes - stretching and curling fingers, moving them independently
- Water play - using spray toys, spray bottles and paint brushes.



- Craft activities - glue sticks and paint brushes. Making collages with paper, decorating with sequins.
- Icing cakes - using a plastic dispenser to push and squeeze out the icing.
- Stirring cake mixtures - using a two handed operation, one to hold the bowl the other to stir. Encourage anti-clockwise rotation



- Strengthening activities - swinging from a climbing frame, grasping to climb, crawling through tunnels.

Activities to encourage mark making

Mark making doesn't just have to take place on paper.

- Draw shapes in the air with a wand
- Dance with a ribbon in your writing hand
- Chalk on boards or dark coloured sugar paper



- Draw in the sand.



- Finger paint on the table with cold water paste and powder paints or use shaving foam, rice or gloop (cornflour and water)
- Make rubbings on rough surfaces.



- Have a box of interesting objects/materials that your child can explore. Use natural materials:- wood, suede, hessian, fur, twigs, shells, moss, leaves, flowers, pebbles, feathers etc
- Let your child paint with water across a large flat surface. E.g. on a wall or floor area.

Useful websites

- www.therapystreetforkids.com
www.surreycc.gov.uk/schools-and-learning/physical-development-in-the-eyfs