

Supporting Your Child's Writing at Home - Early Years

Learning to Write

Writing is a complex skill, which requires both physical strength and control, alongside a secure knowledge of letters and the sounds they make. During the early years, most children will move from exploring the way in which they can make different marks to assigning meaning to their drawings and emergent 'writing'. Younger children tend to control their movements from their shoulder or elbow and so they need lots of space to make their marks. At this stage, they are likely to be holding a pencil or crayon with a palmer grasp (whole hand). As their physical skills improve, they will begin to make marks driven by their wrists and then the smaller joints within their hands. As this process happens, they will move towards a tripod pencil grip, which is optimum for writing.

As your child begins to form recognisable letters, you will notice them trying to apply their knowledge of phonics (letters and the sounds they make) in their writing. They are likely to write words in the way in which they hear them, for example, 'one' as 'wun'. This is a typical part of their development and they will learn the correct spelling patterns of different words as they progress through the stages of phonics learning. All children from Reception onwards will start to learn 'Key Words'. These are common words which feature regularly in children's reading and are often difficult for them to sound out in the usual way e.g. 'the'. We are keen to support the children to write these words correctly as soon as they are able to read them.

Learning to write your own name is an exciting milestone, enabling children to label their own work or sign a greetings card. Your child will be taught that capital letters are usually only found at the beginning of a sentence or the beginning of someone's name. You can support them by teaching them to write their own name with a capital letter at the start and lowercase letters for the rest.



Palmer Grasp



Tripod Grip

Being a Positive Role Model

Parents can show the value of writing by modelling how and when we need to write in day-day contexts e.g. writing a shopping list or greetings card. Children will see lots of adults around them typing or texting, so it is important that they also see us write with a pen or pencil.

Developing Fine and Gross Motor Skills

Younger children and those at an earlier stage of development would benefit from:

- painting (or making marks using water) with large rollers, brooms or household painting brushes

- sweeping with a broom or dustpan and brush
- cooking e.g. mixing ingredients in a bowl or kneading dough
- throwing or catching a large ball
- large chalking on a wall or floor outside

Many letters start with an anticlockwise motion or a straight line going from top to bottom. Practising large anticlockwise circles and straight lines starting at the top can help children get used to these movements. As children move from Nursery to Reception they will become ready to develop more of their fine motor control and coordination. You could help at home by providing your child with:

- threading activities
- cutting activities e.g. following a line or cutting out the pieces for a collage or design project
- fishing games
- building with smaller objects (natural objects or smaller construction kits)
- learning to use a knife and fork to eat and to prepare food e.g. cutting up fruit or buttering their own toast

All children will also benefit from a wide range of sensory mark-making and malleable experiences e.g. play dough, gloop and shaving foam. Here are a few examples to get you started!

Cooked Playdough Recipe

- 2 cups plain flour
- 2 cups water
- 1 cup salt
- 2 tsps. cream of tartar
- 1 tbsp oil
- Food colouring (optional)

Add all of the ingredients together and heat gently in a pan. Once the dough comes together, turn out and knead a few times until it reaches the correct consistency. You can vary your dough by adding food colouring (to the water before combining), herbs or spices.

Cornflour 'Gloop'

- 2 cups cornflour
- 1 cup water (you may need less than this)
- Food colouring (optional)

Gradually add water to the cornflour until it has combined to create a unique consistency. It will appear both solid and liquid as it is handled, which makes for very interesting exploration. Children can make marks in it with a variety of everyday utensils e.g. a spoon, lolly sticks or fingers.

Cloud Dough

- 5 cups plain flour
- 1 cup baby oil
- Food colouring (optional)

Stir the oil into the flour and then add food colouring if using. The consistency will feel a bit like damp sand and can be squeezed or used with different moulds.