

Especially for parents of preschoolers! 

Delighting in Writing

Drawing and Writing

Preschoolers learn from experiences that help them use drawings and symbols to represent their ideas. Such pre-writing activities let them begin to develop the skills they'll use throughout their lives to communicate through print.

What is the practice?

Writing is communicating ideas through print. Writing focuses children's attention on print, helps them learn that letters represent sounds, and helps their early reading skills. The practice of early writing is based on research showing how children ages 3 to 5 can use drawings and symbols to express thoughts, feelings and ideas. They can print or copy their first name. They can use letter-like shapes to write words or ideas. When given opportunities, young children make meaningful pictures and stories using written symbols.



What does the practice look like?

Early writing by young children combines drawing, "made-up" spelling, copying, and repeating patterns. With drawing, the child tells his thoughts and interests by drawing pictures and then "reading" them. Scribbling is often used by young children, with the scribbles going left to right and sometimes looking like cursive writing. Young children will often put letters together in random order. They might even use some of the letters in their name. Invented spelling is when a child writes by using his own spelling for words. Sometimes a single letter stands for a word, as in *h* for *house*. Or the beginning and ending letters stand for a word, as in *dg* for *dog*.

How do you do the practice?

Writing can be a part of family life. Ordinary home and community activities provide natural opportunities for putting early writing skills to work.

- Young children can draw picture reminders. They can also use their version of "writing" to fill in events and dates on a family calendar.
- Family members can leave each other notes at a message center.
- Before shopping, you can ask your child to write a list of his own. A parent can tell the child, "I need to make a list. Would you like to make one too?" They can take turns "reading" the lists aloud.
- Your child can add a picture or note to a letter written to grandparents, other family members, or friends. He can use scribble writing or invented spelling to add to the note.
- You can help your child connect spoken and written words by having him draw a picture. They he can tell a story about it. You can write out the story under the picture just as your child tells it. Then read it back to him.
- Help your child write and draw a story. You can make a simple booklet from paper folded in half and stapled on the fold. Make a fancier book with paper and a cardboard cover. The book can be bound by lacing thick yarn through holes made with a hole-punch.

How do you know the practice worked?

- Is your child spending more time "writing"?
- Does the child seem pleased about his letters, notes, or stories?
- Is your child trying different ways to write or is he trying new ways to spell?

Look at more 'writing' with preschoolers

Message on a Sand Cake!

Four-year-old Kameko sits next to her mother on the beach. She is playing in the sand with a small plastic shovel and pail. Over and over she fills the bucket with damp sand, then dumps it in a pile. After awhile, she begins to mold the sand into a circle and flattens out the top. "See? I'm making a cake!" she tells Mom. "What a yummy cake," Mom replies. "What kind of a cake is it?" "A birthday cake!" says Kameko. "Who's birthday is it?" asks her mother. "My birthday" answers Kameko. "Oh, I see. Then maybe you can write *Happy Birthday, Kameko* on it," Mom suggests, handing her a small piece of stick. Kameko makes lines and squiggles all over her "cake." When she finishes, Mom asks her to read the cake. "Happy birthday me!" Kameko says with satisfaction. "Yes, that's what it says," agrees her mother.



Mail Call!



Asia climbs onto the couch next to her granddad. "I'm writing a letter to my brother," he tells the three-year-old. "I'm just about finished. Then we'll put it in an envelope and mail it." Asia picks up his address book and looks at the cover. "That book tells where to send mail to people," Granddad explains. "Here, why don't you write something on this letter to Uncle Cliff, too?" Granddad hands Asia the pen and paper. He watches patiently as she makes marks and lines across the bottom of the page. He says, "Asia sees Uncle Cliff." "Oh, that's good! Uncle Cliff will be happy to know you want to go see him," says her granddad. "Now I'll write his address on the envelope and you write something for him on back of it." Asia watches her granddad address the envelope using his address book. Then she takes the pen and copies him, making curvy lines while looking at a page in the address book.

Just Like Mom!

Five-year-old Carlos has a fine-motor delay. He sits next to his mother at the desk of her home office. She is working on a company report. Seeing Carlos take interest in her writing, she hands him an earlier draft of the report. She asks her son to "help" her with it. "What do you want to write in the report?" she asks Carlos. "I can write about Grandpa," he replies. "OK, that's a good idea," she answers. She hands her son a crayon that he grasps awkwardly. "Where do you think we should write about Grandpa?" Carlos looks the page over and points to where he wants to write. "Okay," says his mother. "Write all the good things about Grandpa." Carlos takes the crayon and draws broad, uneven strokes across the entire page with the crayon. "That's great writing, Carlos!" says his mother. "Read to me about Grandpa." Carlos "reads" his writing and his mother listens intently. She doesn't expect Carlos' writing to look much like adult writing yet because of his delays. "Wow! That's a really good report, Carlos. Thanks for helping me!"

