

Especially for practitioners working with infants!

Let Little Fingers Do the Drawing

Pre-Emergent Writing

Before young children are able to hold a crayon or pencil and mark or scribble, they often use their fingers to draw and “write.” This practice guide includes ideas for helping infants develop the building blocks for beginning writing.

What is the practice?

This practice guide includes activities that help infants learn to use their fingers to “draw,” “paint,” and “scribble.” The activities will help children make the connection between using their fingers and making some kind of mark or scribble. It offers some ways for parents to encourage their children to experiment.

What does the practice look like?

Beginning writing happens any time a child uses his fingers to scribble or mark. Babies running their fingers through a gooey substance and squishing it between their fingers is such an activity.

How do you do the practice?

There are many different opportunities for finger drawing. These include non-toxic finger paints, play dough, and other mixtures. There are recipes for different kinds of finger paints and play dough that are safe for infants. They can be found on the Web by searching “finger paints” and “play dough.”

- Start by identifying which materials might be most interesting to your children. “Messy” infants might enjoy playing with something gooey like a flour/water or cornstarch/water mixture. “Neat” infants are more likely to want to play with play dough or water. The more enjoyable the activity is to the child, the more he or she will benefit from the activity.
- Find an appropriate place to do the activities. “Finger painting” with a creamy flour/water or cornstarch/water mixture can be done on the child’s highchair tray. Try finger painting in the bathtub before the child’s bath. “Painting” the sidewalk, deck, or other outdoor surface with water dripping from the child’s fingers is easy and does not involve clean up.
- Encourage children to use their fingers to “draw” by showing how to make different types of marks and scribbles. Show your excitement! If you find the activity enjoyable, chances are the children will like it too.
- Show a child he or she did well by smiling and commenting on his/her efforts and successes. A little bit of acknowledgment will go a long way in sustaining the child’s play. Try not to overdo it!



How do you know the practice worked?

- Is the child using his fingers more often to “draw” or “mark” things?
- Does the child seem pleased about or intent on trying to mark something?
- Has the child shown interest in trying to make marks or do different things with his hands and fingers?

Take a look at more infant finger drawing

Play Dough Drawings

Gloria's teacher, Benita, has found a fun way to help her use her fingers to make her mark! She fills Gloria's walker tray with play dough, which 12-month-old Gloria pokes and squeezes to produce interesting effects. Benita takes two or three different play dough colors and mashes them so they fill up the walker tray. At first, she shows Gloria how to dig her fingers into the play dough. Now, Gloria has developed her own way of drawing! She loves to push her fingers into the play dough and look at her "drawings." After doing this for a few times, she grabs a handful of play dough and squeezes it between her fingers. Gloria delights in seeing the play dough ooze out of her hands.



Fun in the Tub

Mikey's middle name might as well be "Messy." The more he can get into things, the happier he is. When Mikey was able to sit up in the bathtub his home visitor suggested introducing him to finger paints. Before filling the tub with water, Mom smears finger paints on the tub bottom all around Mikey. That's all it takes! He just loves to run his fingers through the paint and make big swooping motions back and forth. Mikey's mother joins in and adds different sounds to the hand painting motions. More and more, Mikey tries to repeat the sounds his mother makes and says a few of his own.

How Does That Feel?

Chip's parents both know that he will need to learn to read Braille when he gets older. His early interventionist gave Mom and Dad some ideas about different kinds of drawing games to play with Chip. These games help 9-month-old Chip "get the feel" of different textures and shapes. Chip sits in his highchair waiting for Dad to start the game. His father encourages him to reach into different containers—one filled with cooled cooked oatmeal, one filled with pudding, and one filled with water. His dad describes what Chip is doing and waits for him to "tell" Dad what he is doing. Chip and his mother play a game of drawing in pudding on the highchair tray. It is clear that Chip has figured out that different kinds of hand movements produce different kinds of effects. He often squeals and vocalizes in response to what he has done.

