

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 pudding or squeezing whipped cream between them are examples of such activities.

How do you do the practice?

There are many different opportunities for finger drawing. These include finger paints, yogurt, tinted water, whipped topping, pudding, and play dough. 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 types of material will be most interesting to your child. “Messy” infants most likely will enjoy playing with pudding or whipped cream. “Neat” infants are more likely to want to play with play dough or water. The more fun and enjoyable the activity is to the child, the more he will benefit from the activity.
- Find an appropriate place to do the activities. “Finger painting” with whipped cream, pudding, or other foods 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 the child to use his fingers to “draw” by showing him how to make different types of marks and scribbles. Show your excitement! If you find the activity enjoyable, chances are he will like it too.
- Show the child he did well by smiling and commenting on his 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.



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Infant Scribbling Activities

 *Pre-Emergent Writing*

The infants in your care may be starting to try to feed themselves with a spoon. This often happens around the same time infants show an interest in how other kinds of tools and instruments can be used. Infants can become fascinated with writing instruments and how to mark and scribble with them. This practice guide has some ideas for how you and parents of children for whom you care can encourage infants to experiment with early writing.

What is the practice?

Crayons, pencils, pens, or any other writing instruments that are easy for young children to grasp and hold will work best. Making marks and scribbles comes naturally to most children. Try showing children how to use drawing and writing instruments to scribble. It is often all it takes for them to try to do it on their own.

What does the practice look like?

A child is seated on her father's lap with paper spread out on the table in front of them. The little girl's father picks up a crayon and starts scribbling while saying "Swish, swish! Look at what Daddy is drawing." The girl reaches for the crayon and takes it from her father. Her father points to the paper and says "Sweetie, scribble here." He gently guides his daughter's hand to the paper where she tries to make a mark. Dad puts just enough pressure on the top of the crayon so that his daughter's efforts are successful. The little girl keeps trying and trying until she finally does it on her own.



How do you do the practice?

There are many different ways of providing young children opportunities to scribble and draw. Here are some ideas you might find helpful for the children with whom you work.

- Find a place that is comfortable for the child where her hands are free to hold a writing instrument. Try having the child sit on your lap. Sitting in a high chair and sitting by herself on the floor are a few other positions that you may want to try.
- Big crayons, fat pencils, and adapted writing instruments are generally the first objects young children will use to scribble. Search the Web for adapted handles. You will find a host of ideas about how to make it easy for the child to hold writing instruments.
- Nontoxic felt-tipped markers are generally easy for infants to hold and use. You might even try big pieces of chalk. The easier it is for a child to hold onto a writing tool, the more likely she is to be successful.
- Pick the right surface for the kind of writing instrument the child is using. Provide paper for crayons and pencils, a white board for magic markers, and a blackboard or sidewalk for chalk.
- Try turning the scribbling activity into a conversation. Talk about what the child is doing and show how excited you are by her efforts at writing.

How do you know the practice worked?

- Does the child show increased interest in scribbling and making marks?
- Is she getting better at picking up and holding a writing instrument?
- Does she seem pleased at what she has done by smiling, vocalizing, and getting excited?

Take a look at more scribbling activities

Shopping List

Anytime Courtney's mother is writing a note or making a shopping list, 9-month-old Courtney reaches and grabs the pencil out of her mother's hand. She then proceeds to try to "write" like mom and in the process makes scribbling marks on the paper. Courtney's home visitor suggests that, based on this interest, Mom could give Courtney her own pencil and paper so she can finish her own writing. Mom experiments with different writing instruments to find ones that Courtney can easily hold and use to make scribbling marks. Courtney's mother has turned this activity into a conversation time. While they write, Mom talks about the person to whom they are writing and what needs to be on their shopping list.



Stick With It!

Sixteen-month-old Mika loves being outside and playing. One of her favorite places lately is the vegetable garden area her caregiver Tani is preparing in her back yard. Mika loves to dig, dump, move, and squeeze the cool garden soil. Tani notices that Mika has gotten pretty good at trying to dig in the garden plot with a small toy shovel. Tani decides to see what Mika will do if she pretends to write in the soil. She smoothes out the soil and tells Mika that she is going to write their names. She uses a stick and prints their names while repeating each letter. Mika is fascinated by what she sees and takes a stick and starts to "write" in the soil. She does her best and has fun making all sorts of scribbles and lines. Tani shows her excitement by saying, "Mika, you spelled your name. You are such a good writer!" Mika beams with delight.

Mouse Magic

Fourteen-month-old Joshua is not able to hold onto writing tools like pens and pencils because of his motor impairment. His early interventionist told Joshua's mother about a special computer mouse that allows young children to draw and write on a computer screen. Mom sits Joshua on her lap in front of the computer. She places his hand on the mouse and moves it about to show him how it makes scribbles and marks on the computer screen. Joshua is fascinated, making lots of noise and pointing excitedly to the screen. In no time he is scribbling and making all kinds of marks. As soon as Mom clears the screen, Joshua is at it again.

