

*Especially for practitioners working with young children!* 

# 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, and offer 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. Many homemade recipes for different kinds of “finger paints” that are safe for infants can be found on the Web by searching **finger paints**.

- 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, but 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. His home visitor showed Mikey's mother that as soon as he was able to sit up in the bathtub it was an opportunity to introduce Mikey to finger paints. Before filling the tub with water, Mom smears finger paints on the tub bottom between Mikey's legs and in front of him. 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?*

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

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