

Especially for parents of toddlers! 

Art of Writing

 *Scribbling and Drawing*

Before young children start learning to write, they learn that making marks on a page has meaning that others understand. To help your child learn this, give him plenty of engaging materials to use for drawing and scribbling. Talk with him about what he is doing as he uses them.

What is the practice?

Many everyday activities can help your toddler build skill and interest in scribbling and drawing. Having opportunities to draw/write—especially with parents joining in the fun—helps toddlers develop early writing abilities.

What does the practice look like?

Using markers to draw on a white board. Making designs with water or chalk on a sidewalk or fence. Sketching squiggles in a sandbox with a stick. These are activities that help young brains and hands prepare for writing. Such activities are most powerful when you give praise and ask questions to further your child's experimenting and interest.



How do you do the practice?

Every day is filled with natural opportunities for toddlers to scribble, draw, and “write.” Focus on what captures your child's interest, and start there.

- Supply your toddler with plenty of different drawing materials to use. You can include markers, crayons, pencils, paints, and chalk, as well as a variety of surfaces to try out. Craft paper, lined paper, chalkboards, and even the bathtub are interesting surfaces where your child can make her mark. Let her try painting with common household or craft items. Fun painting tools are drinking straws, feathers, cotton balls, cotton swabs, toy cars, and empty spools. Encourage your child to use her imagination and be creative.
- Let your child's artwork and scribbling be a source of pride. Mount and display his work at home and ask for his help in your own everyday writing tasks. Toddlers love to “sign” their own pictures, or “write” their names on a letter to a relative or friend.
- Help your child understand that drawing can carry meaning by asking him to tell you about his pictures. Show interest in what he is working on. Ask questions about the colors he is using, the shapes he is making, and what his picture is about.

How do you know the practice worked?

- Is your child eager to draw on his own and display his work?
- Does he show curiosity about what will happen when he uses different kinds of art materials?
- Is he using scribbling in a purposeful way to “write” his name, tell a story, or draw a picture?

Take a look at more of the art of writing

Water "Paint"

Charity and her mom are working in the garden on a hot day. Charity seems to be getting a little bored pulling weeds. "Do you want to play with water?" Mom asks. Charity agrees with delight. Together they fill a pail from the outdoor faucet and find a few old paint brushes in the garage. "You could use these brushes and water to paint the deck," Charity's mom suggests. "You can make it really pretty!" Charity loves painting the wooden deck floor, then the sidewalk, and even the house with water. She loves watching the darker colors of the wet spots fade as they dry in the sun. Then she paints some more!



Finger Paint Gift List

Two-year-old Rafael's mom is writing a list for a Christmas shopping trip. It isn't easy to think with Rafael bouncing around the room. "Come help me, Rafi," calls Mom. She sits him down beside her at the kitchen table with colorful felt-tipped markers and an extra-large piece of paper. Mom tells him, "This will be your Christmas list, Rafi. Draw what you want Santa Claus to bring you." "I want trucks," Rafael starts, "and boots and a puppy and...." "Great," his mom says. "Draw them for Santa so he'll know what to bring you." Each time Rafael finishes a drawing, his mom stops her work and he tells her what he drew. "This is beautiful," she tells Rafael. "Look at all this orange! Santa will be so impressed. I'm going to hang up your picture list so everyone can see how hard you worked."

Bath Paints

Leslie, a 34-month-old with fine-motor delays, likes playing with toys that feel interesting to the touch. Some examples are play dough and finger paints. When Leslie takes a bath, her mom gives her bath paints that wipe away easily with water. Bath paints encourage Leslie to use drawing skills without worrying about getting too messy. "What color do you need today?" Leslie's mom asks. "Blue," Leslie says, and her mom squirts some into her palms. She makes big circles on the side of the tub. "I'm drawing water," Leslie says, "I'm drawing a big rain storm." "How does rain look coming down?" Leslie's mom asks. Leslie makes long streaks with the sides of her hands. Her mom helps guide her fingers to make smaller raindrops. "That's beautiful rain," her mom says. "Maybe you can also draw some flowers growing in the rain." Leslie looks forward to her bath time with paints every day.



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Get Write on It!

Scribbling and Drawing

Before your child learns to write, he learns that marks he makes on a page mean something to other people. You can help your child during this process in two important ways. (1) Provide him with lots of interesting materials and opportunities for writing and scribbling. (2) Talk with him about what he is doing as he draws, scribbles, and “writes.”

What is the practice?

Many activities you do daily with your toddler help develop her skills and interest in writing. Research shows that having varied experiences with writing materials, will give a toddler a good start at learning to write. This is especially true when the child works with drawing/writing tools alongside an interested, responsive adult.

What does the practice look like?

There are many examples of pre-writing activities toddlers enjoy. Using markers to write a secret “message” or a stick to scratch letter shapes in the sand are two examples. Each of them encourages practice and appreciation of writing. These activities are most powerful when you offer encouragement and ask questions to further your child’s exploration and interest.



How do you do the practice?

You can find opportunities to provide your toddler with writing experiences throughout your day together. Focus on what your child seems to be interested in and drawn to. Let that be your starting point.

- Supply your toddler with plenty of different writing materials. Let him try markers, crayons, pencils, paints, and chalk, as well as a variety of surfaces to experiment on. Suggest he “write” letters to friends and family, make signs for his bedroom, and add words to his drawings.
- Help your child see how useful writing can be by asking for his help in your everyday writing tasks. Toddlers love to “sign” their own pictures, help make a grocery list, or leave a reminder for another family member.
- Your toddler’s writing won’t look much like “real” writing at this stage. But it is important to give him the sense that his writing is important and has meaning. Encourage his efforts by treating his writing seriously and proudly.

How do you know the practice worked?

- Is your child eager to write on his own and display his work?
- Does he show curiosity about what you are writing and want to help?
- Is he using scribbling in a purposeful way to “write” his name, tell a story, or draw a picture?

Take a look at more early writing fun

Letter to Grandma

Manu, who is almost 2 years old, finds his mom writing at the kitchen table. "Me!" Manu says. "Do you want to write too?" his mom asks. "Write!" Manu agrees, and climbs into his seat. His mom gives him some paper and washable markers. "What are you going to write?" she asks him. He seems unsure. "I'm writing to Grandma," she says. "Grandma!" Manu says. "What are you going to tell her about?" "Go to park." Manu begins to scribble with his markers, making quick lines with lots of energy. "That looks interesting," his mom says after a few minutes. "You want to tell me what you're writing?" Manu looks at his paper. "Manu play park. Come see Manu." "I'll get you an envelope," his mom says. "We can send it to Grandma along with my letter so she'll know you want her to visit soon."



Grocery List

When it's time to make a grocery list, Rosie's dad asks his 2-year-old daughter to help. She's always eager to participate. They sit at the kitchen table looking through colorful grocery ads and pointing out foods they especially like. Dad talks about the meals he is planning for the week, and what supplies they will need. He gets paper and a pencil for Rosie and encourages her to make her own shopping list. Rosie tries to copy what Dad is writing. She tries to draw pictures of items she wants and "write" using letter-like shapes and marks. When they've both finished their lists, they "read" them to make sure they didn't forget anything. Then, it's off to the store.

Making Her Mark

Elena, a 28-month-old with limited mobility due to cerebral palsy, is staying at her aunt's house for the day. Aunt Mara knows that Elena loves to draw pictures. She takes out a few big sheets of paper. She makes a set of fat markers easier for Elena to grip by wrapping masking tape around them. She guides Elena's hand so she can make beautiful purple squiggles across the page with her marker. Elena laughs with delight. "Look at that!" her aunt says. "You're drawing purple!" "More," Elena says. Each time she switches markers, her aunt supports her arm a little less until Elena holds the marker herself.

