

Especially for parents of toddlers!

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.

