

Every Child is a Writer: Understanding the Importance of Writing in Early Childhood

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FOSTER WRITING READINESS For parents, teachers and program providers

Infants



Build oral language skills and prepare infants to be future writers:

- Talk to infants
- Read to infants
- Point out written words in the environment
- Provide a print-rich environment (labeled materials, books, wall displays)

Ensure infants take part in proximal stability activities:

- Tummy time
- Swinging
- Jumping
- Removing books from shelves and putting them back
- Being carried in a football hold

Toddlers



Continue strengthening motor skills necessary for writing, provide:

- Puzzles
- Stringing activities – beads (with adult supervision)
- Paper activities – torn paper art, collage, paper chains
- Dressing activities – zipper and snap toys, putting on their own jackets
- Strengthening activities – spray bottle, hole punches, mixing cooking ingredients
- Picture hanging with clothespins
- Finger puppets
- Sensory activities– play dough, sand, finger paint

Introduce toddlers to writing:

- Have children write with their fingers before using writing instruments
- Provide a vertical surface like an easel or chalk board to promote a stable posture for writing and increased wrist extension stability
- Alternate positions during writing activities to enhance core strength
- Encourage a comfortable grip when using writing instruments
- Introduce toddlers to their written first name

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Preschoolers



Help preschoolers learn about the writing process by:

- Modeling writing
- Writing with children
- Giving children time to write independently – journals, bookmaking
- Providing ample opportunities to write throughout the day – group writing, writing center
- Providing writing materials in various centers and places in the home - dramatic play, blocks, science
- Nudging children toward writing props to help them experiment with different functions of writing
- Providing authentic opportunities to write - books, charts, and lists
- Reading aloud wordless storybooks and encouraging children to tell their stories through drawings

Encouraging all forms of emergent writing by:

- Encouraging children to talk about their writing with peers and adults
- Responding to the meaning of children's writing instead of the form
- Asking children to read their writing aloud instead of guessing what they have written or drawn

Host authentic activities in which foundational handwriting skills can be embedded:

- Use activities in which children can practice forming letters, erase quickly, and then practice forming again such as writing in cornmeal or finger paint, or on a large dry erase board
- Provide large blank paper to give children plenty of room to practice forming letters
- Provide broken crayons and triangular pencils and crayons to encourage the tripod grasp (writing instrument is held between the thumb and the index finger, and rests on the side of the middle finger)
- Provide help with letter formation when children make requests – “My M is upside down. How do I fix it?”

Kindergartners



Help kindergarten-age children understand the process and functions of writing by:

- Writing together
- Using the process writing approach – Writer's Workshop
- Modeling the steps of the writing process – prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing
- Inviting children to write independently for extended periods of time
- Conferencing with children about their writing
- Allowing children to share their writing with others – authors' teas, pair shares
- Displaying functional examples of children's writing around the room - cubby labels, classroom rules
- Setting up classroom or family mailboxes to encourage functional writing between peers and family members
- Providing examples of conventional writing around the classroom or home
- Using writing terminology – author, editor, publisher
- Encouraging children to use invented spelling and stretch words as they write to hear the sounds

Help build handwriting proficiency by:

- Focus on pencil grip and position
- Introduce letters systematically – all straight-lined letters at the same time
- Describe similarities with other letters when introducing a new letter
- Teach efficient patterns for forming letters – always start at the top and go down
- Ask children to reproduce letters from memory
- Use spatial and temporal vocabulary – top, up and bottom, down