

10 Top Tips for Parents and Educators

PROMOTING A LOVE OF EARLY WRITING

Mastering writing skills at an early age can result in better literacy and communication capabilities, giving children improved prospects in their later education and career. To write meaningfully requires motivation, inspiration and fine motor skills. Children gradually come to understand that writing has meaning and that the words they write can be read back again.

1 MODEL WRITING HABITS

Children thrive on copying the behaviours of the adults they observe around them, so modelling writing habits to children is vital – as is helping them to grasp that writing has meaning. As many adults now write with digital tools instead of pen and paper, we'd recommend using obvious 'writing' actions so that children are less likely to misinterpret what you're doing as browsing the internet or checking your social media.

2 WRITE FOR A REAL PURPOSE

Adults can promote writing by involving children in its real-life purposes, such as shopping lists or letters and cards to friends and relatives. This is especially helpful before children enter the final year of the Foundation Stage, when writing becomes more structured and less spontaneous. Children increasingly use digital technology for their early writing, so it's important to recognise and value all the forms that writing might take for children at home.

3 CREATE THE 'WRITE' ENVIRONMENT

Where possible, providing accessible opportunities to write is beneficial for children who want to engage independently. It can help children to be fully immersed in the experience, aiding their concentration and letting them build up the amount of time they're able to focus. You could keep paper, clipboards and a range of writing tools near where children play, for example. They could also take these outside. Different materials will pique interest.

4 UTILISE THEIR INTERESTS

To inspire children to write and keep them motivated, following opportunities linked to their interests and play is important. They could write invitations for a tea party or a sign for a make-believe shop, for instance, or make a 'lost and found' poster for a character in a story. These opportunities can be created organically by giving children access to a variety of writing tools in the environment.

5 CONSIDER THE PROCESS

In terms of development, children generally learn to speak first, then build their vocabulary and develop the fine motor coordination they need to manipulate a writing instrument. All these stages are important and should be encouraged. As they grow older, the alphabet can be introduced, and you can support them to make links between the spoken language and written words.

6 FOCUS ON FINE MOTOR SKILLS

Before learning to form letters, children will make marks as they learn how to hold instruments like pencils or crayons. In doing this, they'll develop the dexterity and movement in their fingers that's needed for writing. You can support this by engaging in play which boosts these skills – such as threading beads, finger painting and using playdough. Giving them broader implements to hold (chunky crayons, for example) will also help.

7 PHASE IN PHONICS

Using phonics builds the knowledge of sounds and the skill of using letters. For young children to be able to apply what they've learned in their writing, it's important that they get lots of opportunities to playfully explore the sounds that make up words. Moving to more formal correspondences and letter identification too early can be counterproductive: nurseries should be able to advise parents on the right time to introduce this.

8 BUILD A POSITIVE MINDSET

In developing early writing skills, children engage in mark making, which might not accurately represent known letters and can include symbols and pictures. Praising a child's effort here promotes a positive mindset around writing: they're demonstrating that they understand it has a purpose and meaning. Ask them to share what they've written (they'll normally translate it for you!) and try to avoid correcting them too much in that specific moment.

9 TAKE REGULAR BREAKS

While writing and early mark making can be hugely enjoyable, children can also sometimes struggle to sit for lengthy periods of time or engage with writing fully. Regular intervals are encouraged: even making some marks or writing a few words (such as their name) is better than none. You could also factor in some movement breaks. Not forcing children to write in a particular way is key to ensuring they don't become disengaged.

10 LINK WRITING TO READING

As children get older, you can (while reading a story, for example) highlight particular sounds in words – perhaps starting with familiar ones like the letters in their names. You can also show the direction you're reading in (left to right in English; right to left in Arabic and so on), which will help raise their awareness. Highlighting who the author is may also encourage children to begin writing their own stories.

Meet Our Expert

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The National College

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