Literacy: Mark Making and Writing

Literacy is an essential part of our everyday lives. It helps us to understand our world through what we hear, see, say, write and read. Through play and daily activities children can develop the literacy skills that are so necessary for everyday living.

What do we mean by “mark making” and “writing”?

You may notice that your young child enjoys creating patterns with food, sand or bubbles or any other materials. Your child is not just making a mess but making marks and by doing this they are at the very early stages of the writing process. Children begin to write not by forming letters but by making marks. These marks may look like random squiggles but this is the child’s way of beginning to create text. Through making marks children will be developing the skills that will contribute to early writing. Mark making can be used to tell stories, express feelings, make sense of their world and problem solve. Mark making should be a fun and enjoyable experience for your child.

From making marks with different materials, children will move on to using thick crayons to make big circular and straight lines. To you it may look like scribbling but it is an important step on the way to forming letters. By listening to what your child has to say about the marks you will have a better understanding of their meaning.

Marks, to begin with, are a mixture of drawing and writing but as your child develops their writing skills they will begin to differentiate between what is drawing and what is writing. Children will then usually progress to writing letters and then their first words. Often it is their name they write first. The letters may not be in the right order but for children this is a big step forward. They can now sign their name on cards and drawings. As your child’s reading skills develop so do their writing skills. Children learn about letter shapes and words begin to have more meaning for them.

How can I help my child?

Remember learning to write is a long process. Children who enjoy mark making and who are praised will find mark making and writing more enjoyable. Try not to correct your child too often or ask them to write things properly. You may find they lose interest in writing. With your support, your child will continue to build on these early stages to become an enthusiastic writer.

Depending on your child’s age and stage of development, please turn over to find some suggestions to try at home.
Some Suggestions to Help Your Child’s Mark Making and Writing

Chat to your child about their picture and find out what it is all about.

Encourage your child’s interest in mark making by playing together with pens, crayons, paints and paper. Try to provide a variety of different materials. Rolls of old wallpaper are good for mark making and drawing.

Use long handled rollers to roll paint onto paper.

Wheeled toys or scrubbing brushes can be used to make marks with paint.

Dipping fingers in paint, foam, or gloop can be used to make marks and patterns.

Try going outdoors. Use chalks and water bottles to make marks on paths, walls and patios.

Draw shapes in the air with a wand.

Playdough, threading, water play and finger rhymes all help to develop the pencil grip.

Provide different sizes and thicknesses of crayons, pencils and paintbrushes. Felt pens may make marks more easily. Water based felt pens are available.

Make sure your child sees you when you are writing lists, birthday cards, letters and appointments on the calendar. This helps an understanding of the purpose of writing.

Carry pens and paper in your bag so that your child can see them being used in different situations.

When writing texts or emails to family or friends explain what you are doing and involve your child.

Old calendars or diaries are useful for writing on.

Provide clip boards, envelopes and paper for writing.

Hopefully these suggestions have sparked some ideas of your own. Have fun trying them with your child.