



Mark Making and Developing our Muscles for Writing (Throughout our Early Years)

This information has been put together to help you support your children to become confident and skilful "Mark Makers"

Building the Foundations for Writing!



Why is Mark Making Important?

Mark making gives children the opportunity to explore imaginatively, physically and creatively, to test their ideas and extend their play.

Writing begins long before a child can physically hold and control a pencil or crayon effectively. Mark making is the foundation that underpins a child's ability to write and the journey to becoming a confident writer begins at birth.



Remember children learn that marks have meaning by watching adults writing. Encourage your child to 'write' with you e.g. shopping lists, phone messages etc

'We learn to move and move to learn'

For the developing child the ability to move the body and explore the environment influences intellectual, social and emotional development. It leads to knowledge and understanding about the world and how we fit into it. It also helps us to develop and formulate concepts and ideas, which later are shown through drawing and writing.



Your child's Physical Development...

To be effective writers children need to develop their "Muscles for Writing".

All children are different and the development of gross motor skills are influenced by a number of factors e.g. a child's sex, opportunities for experience, motivation or interest. Generally, development follows a similar pattern.

From birth a baby's physical development begins with gaining more control of their eyes and head movement, lifting their heads up and turning their heads from side to side. Then shoulder work as they begin to crawl building strength and coordination of movement. As they begin to walk they start to develop stability especially as they walk and play on uneven surfaces, they also begin to get a sense of where their bodies are in space and continue to develop their spacial awareness, in time becoming more skilful movers. They learn stabilizing skills as they begin to climb play equipment and climb stairs.

Physical development moves down the spine to the tips of their toes, this allows the baby to develop increasing control over their arms, then hands and eventually fingers.

Remember children's development of motor skills happen in different ways and at different rates. They may skip stages or move backwards and forwards between them.



Physical development is a key aspect in children becoming "Mark Makers".

We know the bones in a young child's hand have not yet hardened and are instead very rubbery making smaller more fine motor movements more difficult.



It is important that children are given the appropriate tools to make marks. If they are given tools that are too narrow or thin they will find them very difficult to use and this can also increase the risk of damage to the wrists, hands and fingers in later life.



Remember children are developing their skills all the time through their everyday play and activities. Make lots of opportunity to explore mark making both inside and out, messy and creative using all their senses, let them come up with imaginative ideas thinking of ways to do things, sometimes its more about the "How" than the "What"!

So enjoy the Magic of Mark Making and...

Have fun!



Stage 1 - Shoulder Pivot - Grip: Palm or Palmer

Stiff wrist, straight elbow,
most movement coming from the shoulder.

At this stage of development the muscles of their upper body that are the most well developed are the neck, chest and back. It is these muscles that have the most strength, so it is these muscles that are used to help the hand to make those first emergent marks. The types of marks that a child at this stage will make are likely to be long and straight to large and circular.



Activities that will help:

Sweeping with brooms, clear leaves or make lots of bubbles on the floor with fairy liquid and your brush. Water painting using large decorating brushes on fences and gates, heavy watering cans.

Climbing and swinging on monkey bars, using wheelbarrows to move things as you play.

Kneading and stretching bread dough.

Helping to wash your car using large circular movement.



Stage 2 - Elbow Pivot - Palmer - Supinate Grasp

Elbow doing most of the work
shoulder used as more of a support.

There are usually two noticeable stages in the elbow pivot:

Emergent stage

Elbow bends allowing for more movement but the shoulder still main power movement, sawing motion with arm moving backwards and forwards.

Advanced elbow pivot stage

Using muscles in upper and lower arm to swing arm

in and out from body in a circular motion (think stirring in a pot or creating a figure eight). Often when the elbow pivot is developing the wrist stays quite stiff and the grip is still palmer supinate (palm facing up).

Activities that will help:

Lots of rollers and long handled brushes, use scrubbing brushes and bubbly water to clean things outside, scooters, big toys, stones etc. Let your child hammer nails into wood, with your close support they will learn how to take on this challenge safely. Make sandwiches and cakes together, as well as helping to develop muscles in the shoulder, upper arms and hands it also gives you the chance to help your child understand how to use tools safely. Play with play dough and plastiscine, different textures and resistance, add flour shakers to encourage lots of upper and lower arm movement and using their elbow pivot.



Stage 3 - Wrist Pivot (Digital Pronate)

Wrist Pivot - usually palmar moving into Digital - Pronate grasp (digit meaning finger and pronate meaning to grasp with the palm turned down) Children stick with this for least amount of time before pivot shifts again. Held with fingers, wrist straight, often elbow tucked into the body, shoulder movement minimal, forearm moves as a unit. When a child adopts a digital pronate grip it is a clear sign that their stage of fine motor manipulation is moving forward. Encourage rotation and small movements.



Activities that will help:

Finger rhymes, rolling play dough. Using rollers to paint with and house painting and fence painting using decorating brushes and water all developing the up and down action. Set a challenge! Use screwdrivers to see how long it takes to screw in long and short screws into wood, time your child as they turn nuts onto bolts as quickly as they can this will need lots of wrist strengthening movement. Use thick pens, chalks and mark making implements.



Stage 4 - Static Tripod Grasp

Tools are held similar to a darts player, holding with all five fingers.

Movement mainly comes from the wrist, but as hand strength improves there will be some finger movement, continuous adjustment of other hand to maintain balance and coordination.

Children need to develop strength and control of their Pincer Grasp or Grip, Palm Arches and In-Hand Manipulation.



Activities that will help:

Picking up and collecting objects in your hand, pasta or worms for example also round objects like conkers or marbles which you have to rotate in the palm of one hand will help develop In-Hand Manipulation.



Have fun turning on taps to fill your watering can or bucket, or unscrewing and screwing on bottle lids during water play. Use big tongs to pick up objects or have fun squashing up play dough in your hand. At bath time play with sponges squeezing out as much water as you can. All these movements will help strengthen Palm Arches.

Try using tweezers to pick up small objects or peg up washing. Turn into hedgehogs as you pinch pegs onto your t-shirt. Thread small beads to make bracelets, construct with Lego or plant seeds, all developing skills that enable a child to pick up small items using thumb and index finger, pincer skills needed for good pencil control.



Stage 5 - Dynamic Tripod Grasp

Tools held using thumb, first and middle finger, thumb and little fingers flexed to form stable arch, wrist slightly extended.

Fingers beginning to move independently as the child develops their finger muscles.

Much more fluid movement.

Activities that will help:

Using finger rhymes, doing up and undoing buttons, zippers, buckles. Try opening your hands with palm spread and then use your thumb to touch each of your fingertips in turn. After each individual touch always return to palms spread. Start with one hand and then both hands together for more difficulty. These activities all support the ability to turn and rotate the thumb so that it can touch each fingertip of the same hand, Thumb Opposition!



Finger Isolation is needed to allow children to hold and manipulate a pencil or paintbrush as well as tie laces etc. It is the ability to move each finger one at a time.

As children develop and become more dexterous they learn to move their fingers individually, have fun finger painting, practise doing up poppers, buttons, and zips. Play with phones and tills and get creative with wool, string and pipe cleaners.

It is important for your child to develop their Knuckle, PIP and DIP joints in their fingers, as they help you to be able to manipulate well and to support a tripod grip. You will need to play with things that are small and fiddly and malleable. Clay or play dough or stretchy elastic any material that gives you resistance.



There are many other areas that need to be secure or underpinned before a child can be an effective writer, children need to develop good co ordination skills to learn to write.

Why don't you try out some of these suggestions with your children?

Bi-lateral Integration (is the ability to use both sides of the body simultaneously and independently)

Open/close screw top jars.

Thread beads (copying pattern from left to right).

Roll a rolling pin over bubble wrap, plastiscine, clay, pastry, play dough.

Screw nuts onto bolts.

Use scissors to cut fringes, circles and spirals.

Make sandwiches using a knife to spread and cut.



Hand/Co-ordination

Make patterns in the air, sand and various surfaces.

Use a finger then crayon to mark a way through a maze.

Copy shapes using a variety of media, chalk, paintbrush, crayon, felt tip or coloured pencils.

Throw/aim balls.

Cut on lines, curves and circles.

Pouring sand, flour or even sawdust with spoons into containers or envelopes.

Pouring water from one container to another.



Shoulder and Girdle Stability

- Rolling over and over and maintaining a straight body position.
- Throwing beanbags into a target using both arms at once and keeping arms straight.
- Commando crawling along the floor.
- Wheelbarrow races.
- Putting both hands flat out flapping hands gently up and down or making small circles with hands.
- Writing on a blackboard.
- Press-ups against a wall, keeping elbows off the wall.
- Bunny hopping by placing hands flat on either side of a stool and then jumping from one side to the other.
- Crab walking forwards and backwards.
- In crab position straightening, raising, and lowering one limb at a time progress to.....
- raising same arm and leg then.....
- raising opposite arm and leg.



Children will need to develop their skills in Copying, Tracing and Tracking before being able to write. Why don't you

- Walk in adult's footsteps.
- Follow a track in sand with your finger.
- Roll a ball along a groove.
- Watch a puppet or other toy move from side to side.
- Play with marble runs, track the marble as it rolls.
- Moving /watching toys or trains move along a track.
- Copying a scene or a pattern made with small objects.
- Copying a design on a pegboard.
- Copying a bead pattern.
- Mimicking shape/lego item made by adult in child's presence.
- Making a fuzzy felt picture like adult's.



Children need good attention skills to be effective writers.

Here are some activities to aid Attention

Completing Activities - for example, continuing with a puzzle until the last piece is put in. It is important for the activity to be age appropriate for it to be achievable for your child to do, also for you to give encouragement and assistance if required to avoid your child giving up.

Play table top games, Pairs, Board Games etc, staying involved and focused until the game is over. Start with short games, 5 minutes, and build to longer periods, maybe 10 - 15 minutes whatever your child is comfortable with.

Explore and Investigate your Environment, this will help build up long periods of concentration and attention



Children will have to be able to listen attentively and follow instructions before being able to learn to write.

Clap different rhythms for the child to copy.

Recite number Rhymes and Nursery Rhymes

Play musical instruments behind a screen and get your child to copy.

Play sound-sequence games e.g. **clap - whistle- click etc**

Try sound Lotto.

Give simple instructions/simple sentences for child to repeat starting very simply and slowly and become increasingly complex.

Give simple instructions for your child to follow. Start with one item (give me....) then gradually increase.

Children need to be aware of similarities and differences between shapes and items and be able to find objects against busy backgrounds before learning to read and write.

Find small blocks amongst large ones.

Find blue marble among green ones.

Find and circle specific item in a busy picture e.g. car in street scene or juggler in a circus ring.

Sort a mixture of items into size, colour and texture.

Find odd one out in a collection of objects.

Gather all their favourite coloured Smarties from box.

Find their own shoes from a larger group.

Jigsaws and bead threading.

Matching according to size.

Arranging items (toys or shapes) in sequence according to size.

Matching 3D shapes/items to 2D.

Finding partner to a shape/design/ item from a choice of 2 or more.

