



First Steps toward Printing and Writing

Before young children can begin to print and write they need to develop many other skills. These foundation skills also enable children to use keyboards, paint, play instruments and draw.

Some of these skills are:

Upper body strength and control

Adequate muscle strength is needed before a pencil, crayon or paintbrush can be used. Muscles in the hand, arm and shoulder are all involved in keeping a pencil steady. Young children also use these muscles to work out how much pressure to apply. Children who have not been able to develop big and small muscle skills will struggle the most.

Holding and grasping skills

Figuring out how to hold a thin (or even thick) pencil or crayon is complicated. Very young children often attempt a variety of different grasps -- such as wrapping their whole hand around the pencil -- through observation, practice and demonstration. They will slowly discover the correct way to hold the pencil. Children also struggle with knowing

how tightly to hold a pencil or crayon. Too tight and they hurt their fingers, tire easily, and break a lot of crayons. Too loose and they have little control and often drop the pencil.

Fine motor skills

Picking up pennies, buttoning a sweater, and turning pages in a book are examples of fine motor skills. They are linked to hand-eye coordination which is the ability to take the information the eyes receive and use that to direct the movement of the hands. This ability allows someone to print their name where it needs to be printed, to sew a button, and to see where food is, get it onto a spoon or fork and to direct it to the mouth. Young children only develop hand-eye coordination through practice.

How You Can Help Your Child

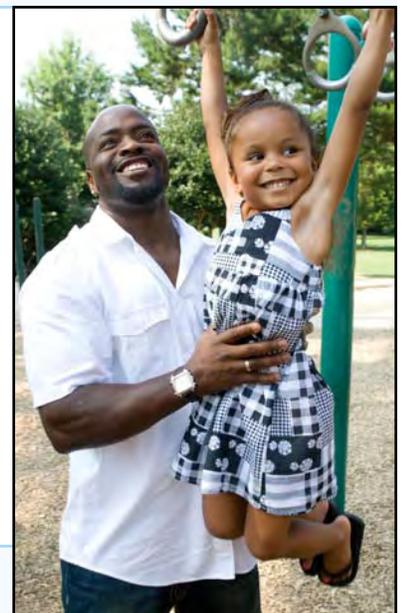
1) **Relax** – don't rush your child. Learning how to write and print takes time. Children didn't learn to sit, stand-up, walk and run all in the same day.

While children need time to explore on their own, it is also important that parents spend time with them playing and learning.

2) **Encourage big muscle development.** Encourage games and

activities that develop upper body muscles. For example, lying on the floor supported by arms, pushing down on the floor, "tug of war" (use a towel), throwing a beach ball, climbing on outdoor climbers (with proper supervision) are all great.

3) **Encourage small muscle activities:** Opportunities to work with small items help to develop fine motor skills. For example:





Blocks (wood, DUPLO®, LEGO®): Pick them up, stack them, build bridges.

Playdough: Make big balls, small balls and long thin rolls. Use a small rolling pin to roll out the dough or a stir stick to make marks in the dough. Make animals or people with small balls for eyes, a nose, etc. In addition to

developing fine motor skills playing with dough encourages creativity.

Crayons: Let children use crayons as soon as they are able to hold them. They will probably not hold a crayon correctly and will most likely only scribble or make some lines on the paper. However, show

enthusiasm for their art work and encourage them to draw pictures, to colour in objects, to use different colours. This is practice little hands need.

Cooking: Stirring and mixing, setting the table, or spreading butter will also develop small muscles.

Scissors: Children like to use scissors and it helps to strengthen hand muscles. It is important that children only use 'safety scissors' – those designed for young hands and without sharp points. It is also important that children are supervised. They may not know what is 'good' to cut (paper you have given them for that purpose) and what is 'not good' (hair, clothes, etc).

These activities will help your child developed muscle strength and control, along with the coordination needed to be able to print, write and draw.



Websites for Parents

Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists – for tips on developing pre-writing skills. <https://www.caot.ca/default.asp?pageid=3604>

The Saskatchewan Ministry of Education. A great handout to help support young children to further develop printing and fine motor skills.

http://curriculum.nesd.ca/Supporting_Docs/ELA_1/General/Developing%20Printing%20and%20Fine%20Motor%20Skills.pdf



The Learning Partnership Asks You:

What does your child like to draw? Send us a copy of their latest art work. We will feature some in a future issue.

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