



Growing readers!

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Supporting very young writers

Preschool aged children love to write. Always in search of a marker or crayon, those early scribbles are an important step on the path to literacy. Parents and preschool teachers can support a writer's efforts in some very simple ways. And it's never too early to start!

A child's writing typically goes through several stages, beginning with scribbling that probably won't include recognizable shapes or letters. From there, children tend to write using more letter-like shapes and later, your child may create a piece of writing that includes random strings of letters. Regardless of the stage, recognize that each effort of crayon to paper has value. Two ways to support your child's effort are through writing time and dictation.

Writing time

In school, writing time may be called Writer's Workshop. During this special time at home, provide time and fun materials for writing. This may include smelly markers, fat pencils and paper of all shapes and sizes. Encourage your child to draw and/or write, and then use this time to talk about what's been created. Early efforts will probably be readable only by your child, but let your child feel like the expert with that piece of writing. As your child gets older, you may find that the writing time starts to include more emphasis on letters and sounds. A child's name and simple words like Mom, Dad and love are often penned early. Regardless of what's been written, be proud of the work and display it for all to see.

Dictation

Writing down what your child says is a simple but effective way to model many important aspects of written language. These dictation activities can take place after a family adventure, an exciting event, or a shared book experience. It can be as simple as writing down a favorite part of a movie or book or recording what was for dessert that night. Have your child sit next to you or watch you write. Your child's watching will help her become aware of many conventions of written language, including capitalization, spacing between words, and punctuation. Keep the dictated sentences short, and use your best handwriting! These dictated sentences may be among the very first things your young writer reads all by herself. When you're done writing, encourage your child to re-read the sentences along with you.

Regardless of topic, it's always fun to hear what your child thinks was the most interesting part of a book or the most exciting part of their day. Capturing it in writing will create a memory, and it will also help your child further down the path of literacy.

Research to Practice: This Growing Reader is based in part from research from *Early Childhood Education Journal* (2012).