

the early years toolkit

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Pre-writing activities

For a child to be able to write and form letters properly in the future, they need initially to learn how to copy and form simple shapes. Always emphasise that work should be from 'Top to Bottom' and 'Left to Right'.

Pre-writing skills do not have to be developed by sitting at a table and doing writing tasks. Movement is a great way to teach children about shape, direction and other concepts associated with pre-writing. Try to keep the movements large and talk to the child about what they are doing in order to draw their attention to the movement, for example: a square goes down, across, up, across.

If you have used this Advice Sheet and not seen any improvement after six months, please contact CYPIT for further advice.

Activities that help develop shape formation include:

- Feeling wooden or plastic shapes/letters with eyes open and then trying to guess what they are with eyes closed.
- Tracing the shape of letters and shapes made of string or sandpaper glued onto card.
- 'Walking' shapes and letters on the floor or 'writing' with your finger on your child's back.
- Drawing shapes and letters in the air, using a whole arm movement.
- Practising drawing on a vertical surface for example a blackboard or paper pinned on the wall.
- Making patterns in flour/talc/sand/shaving foam.
- Potato or sponge printing.
- Making shapes and letters out of play dough or pipe cleaners.
- Copying activities to a defined pattern, for example peg board, fuzzy felt or block patterns.

Activities that help develop pencil control:

- Simple Dot-to-Dots
- Simple Mazes

- Copying and drawing patterns in the sand tray, on a chalkboard, in flour or in shaving cream on a tabletop. You make a simple pattern and then encourage the child to copy it.
- Using finger-paints to make or copy patterns.
- Drawing round other people's hands and body or simple stencils.
- Tracing activities.
- Picture completion. Simple items to be filled in. Start with a completed picture to copy.

Start the activities on a large scale, for example use large pieces of paper stuck to the wall with patterns to copy on rather than A4 sheets. As the child's control and concept of the shape develops, progress onto smaller pieces of work.

Checklist for Pre-Writing Developmental Skills:

Below are the developmental stages that children move through in making shapes or patterns. Learning how to make these shapes will help them develop the necessary skills needed to be able to form letters correctly.

Children learn to imitate the shape first, that is they watch an adult draw the shape first and then do it themselves. They then learn to copy a shape, which means they don't have to watch how the shape is made anymore but can form it just from looking at the pre-drawn shape.

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