

Funky Fingers!

Supporting your child's pre-writing skills

Writing should be an enjoyable, fun experience. Learning to hold a pencil and make marks, which then leads to writing, is a complex development. Nurturing children's mark making skills in the early years helps children to learn to control a pencil, which ultimately ensures they can be successful writers.

Children move through various stages in their mark making. In the initial stages, it is a physical activity. The child grasps tools with their whole hand in a 'palmar grip' moving their arm from the shoulder to make large circular marks and lines. Gradually, the strength and dexterity in their finger muscles develop, giving them more control and precision.

Developing the correct pencil grip, referred to as a 'tripod grip' (using the thumb, index and middle finger) takes time. To achieve this, children should have good strength in their hands, fingers and wrists as well as the ability to move their fingers separately. They should also be able to rest their wrist on a table and use their non-dominant hand to hold the paper still.

Activities to develop strength, dexterity and correct pencil grip

- **Playdough**- pinching, squeezing, poking and rolling.
- **Threading**- beads, pasta straws, pipe cleaners through a colander.
- **Picking up small objects using the thumb and index finger**- learning to use tweezers and pipettes. Playing with Lego. Count dried peas into a pot or post pennies into a money box.
- **Finger rhymes**- stretching and curling fingers, moving them independently.
- **Water play**- using spray toys and spray bottles. Water the flowers and spray the path or windows.
- **Craft activities**- glue sticks and paint brushes. Making collages with paper, decorating with sequins.
- **Icing cakes**- using a plastic dispenser to push and squeeze out the icing and spatulas / knives to spread.
- **Strengthening activities**- swinging from a climbing frame, grasping to climb, crawling through tunnels.
- **Fastenings**- buttons and zips.
- **Stirring cake mixtures**- using a two-handed operation, one to hold the bowl the other to stir. Encourage anti-clockwise rotation.

Activities to encourage mark making

Mark making is much more than just pencil and paper and can include a range of textures and media.

- **Paint**- using an easel and large brushes. Paint the paving stones / decking outside with water. Finger paint using different fingers.



- **Draw**- shapes in the air with a wand. Trace fingers through trays of sand / shaving foam / rice / cornflour and water mix.
- **Dance**- with a ribbon in your writing hand.
- **Squirty water bottles**- to make marks outside on the floor.
- **Chalk**- on boards or outside.
- **Make rubbings**- on rough surfaces.

