

Mark making

Handprints, scribbles, and messy splodges are all part of learning to write. It will really help if you encourage all of these – and more – right from your child’s first few months.



First marks

The first marks that babies and toddlers make are often a result of exploring food with their fingers. You may have noticed your child



making handprints, smearing food or perhaps leaving finger trails in a spilt drink. While this is sometimes messy, it can be helpful to know that these marks are your child’s first steps to becoming a writer.

Using their hands and fingers in this way is really important for developing the muscles they will need to hold and control anything that they want to make a mark with. Later, this will be a pen or pencil for writing – and they need *lots* of practice!

Try giving your baby the opportunity to explore and make patterns in spilt food or drink before you wipe it up – even if it’s a bit messy!

Making marks

Early marks are often the result of movements and gestures made with arms, hands and fingers – perhaps a yoghurt handprint on a highchair, or a finger trail on a steamed-up window or mirror.

As your child grows and develops, they’ll learn that they can use other things to make marks too. They will enjoy making marks in lots of different ways:

- wet or muddy footprints



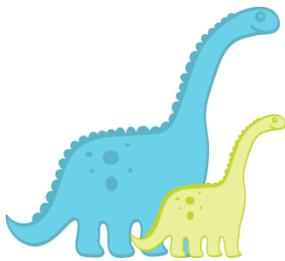
- using objects to make prints in playdough
- brush marks with paint or water
- using sticks to make trails in sand or mud
- a scribble from a crayon or felt tip pen



To start with, toddlers will find chunky mark-making tools such as big crayons and brushes easier to grasp using their whole hand/fist. They'll need *lots* of practice to develop the strength and control to be able to hold and use a pencil later on.

Choosing mark making activities

The things you provide for your baby or child to make marks with will depend on their age and stage of development – and your



preferences too. Your Peep Practitioner will be able to give you some suitable ideas.

Whatever you choose, always stay with your baby or young child when they are mark making – that way you can make sure they stay safe and you can join in the fun too!

Encouraging mark making

When you respond positively to the marks that your child makes they will want to continue exploring. Your encouragement will help them develop the skills they will use later when they draw and write recognisable pictures and letters.

When babies and children feel that their efforts in making marks are valued, they are likely to want to continue exploring.

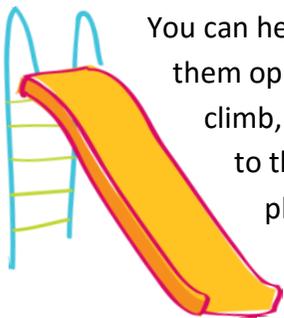
Some children can be a little unsure when exploring new things. They may need time to build their confidence and get used to new textures, smells, colours etc. You can help by modelling ways of exploring mark making materials and by gently encouraging your child to have a go. If it's enjoyable, they will soon discover that mark making can be a fun and happy time.



Mark making muscles

Physical activities are an important part of learning to write.

Before children can make small, controlled marks on paper, they need to build up the muscles in the centre of the body (trunk), their shoulders and arms. These muscles support their balance and give them upper body strength so they can sit up and control their arm movements.



You can help your child to build these muscles by giving them opportunities to crawl, pull themselves up, climb, swing and do other physical activities. A trip to the park is ideal – you could take along some plastic squirty bottles filled with water (e.g. sports drink bottles) and brushes to explore outdoor mark making too!

When children get control of their big muscles, they can concentrate on strengthening and developing the smaller muscles in their hands and fingers. Mark making activities gives children opportunities to:

- move and control their wrists
- move their fingers separately as well as use their thumb and index finger to pick up small items

- develop hand-eye coordination
- practise the little movements that they will use when they start to write.

Mark making activities help babies and young children to develop the physical strength, skills and co-ordination that they need to manipulate tools for mark making, and later for writing.

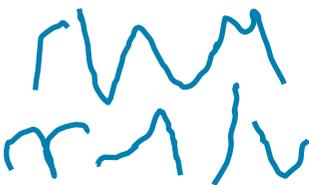
Meaningful marks and significant scribbles

Babies and young children are often very interested in the marks they make. These early marks sometimes simply mean ‘I was here!’



When toddlers begin to grasp chunky crayons or paint brushes and realise that their movements can make marks, they often stop, look and try to change them. In this way, they are letting us know that their marks mean something.

As their strength and control of the tools they are using grow, their marks get more complex – from blobs, wavy lines and dots to the curves and other shapes that they will use later to form letters.



What adults often think of as scribbles are often meaningful to young children.

Try talking to your child when they are making marks and asking them about the marks they have made – you may get an interesting response!

As babies and young children realise that their actions can leave marks, they begin to develop the understanding and the skills they will need to become writers.