

Supporting Your Child's Writing at Home



Writing and reading are part of every aspect of your child's life and while children do lots of literacy based activities at school (e.g. writing, reading, handwriting, phonics), there are many ways that you can support your child at home. This booklet aims to give lots of suggestions and ideas for making writing fun and meaningful at home and improving achievement levels at school.

General Tips and Ideas

The basis of all good writing is good talk. Writing depends on knowing many words and being able to join them together in interesting ways. Encourage your child/ren to: explain a game or activity, describe a person, place, picture or thing, retell stories, talk about things they have done e.g. visits, day at school – encourage detail and predict what might happen next in a story, TV programme or sequel to a film, play word games.

Be a reading model and read to your child (e.g. stories, poems, factual information such as timetables, magazines, newspaper reports, letters, emails, adverts, instructions) – discuss the ways authors use words to shape their ideas. Be a writing model and encourage your child to write alongside you for real purposes e.g. shopping lists, birthday/Christmas lists, labels, invitations, thank you letters, emails to friends, postcards, cards for relatives, scrap books of holidays/hobbies/special events, diaries, posters for real events, short stories or poems for family members, menus, texting, bedroom or house rules. Have an exciting selection of writing materials available e.g. a range of pencils, pens, coloured crayons, writing icing, writing soaps for bath time. Praise your child for trying and don't dwell on mistakes. Focus on content and enjoyment of writing for fun and for purpose.

Early Writing

Encourage young children to look at print on road signs, food packets, in books, magazines and catalogues. Go to the library and read favourite books over and over again. Enjoy them.

Try fun activities, which strengthen your child's hand e.g. cutting, painting, squeezing playdough, picking up small things with tweezers and pegs.

Use magnetic letters and make small words together. Leave a message on the fridge door and encourage your child to reply.

Praise play writing – early squiggles and marks show that your child is beginning to understand writing.

Make up a story together about one of their favourite toys. You write the story as they say the words. Make up a little booklet. Take photographs and use the pictures in the book.

Buy stickers of a favourite TV programme or book. Make your own little book about it.

Let your child write their own Christmas cards, thank you letters, cards or emails to friends or relatives, invitations to a party, or a list of things they need to take on holiday.

Cut up letters from magazines for children to make their names and short sentences.

Make handwriting interesting – practise drawing letters in sand, water or paint, use whiteboards, playdough, pastry or shaving foam.

More confident writers

Continue talking about experiences. This remains the key to good writing. Talk about what has been seen, heard, smelled, tasted and touched with as many details as possible.

Play word-building games to develop descriptive vocabulary such as Boggle, Scrabble, Guess Who, 'What am I?' (one person thinks of something to describe. They give clues by describing it, without saying its name. Other players have to guess what it is with as few clues as possible.)

Create silly sentences or tongue twisters using alliteration (a group of words that all begin with the same sound) e.g. Sad Sid slipped on Sam's salad sandwich.

Encourage your child to rehearse their sentence aloud before they write it down. Also, encourage children to punctuate their sentences with a full stop and capital letter. Celebrate what the writing says first rather than focussing on errors. If a tricky word has been used in an interesting way, this should be praised even if it is spelled wrongly. Remember, it is difficult to get everything right when you are learning!

Let children write part of shopping lists and then let them be responsible for carrying the list and finding certain items.

After making a cake, doing a craft activity or playing a game, challenge children to write instructions for someone else to follow.

Make up a fun way to remember how to spell difficult words e.g. Big elephants Can Always Understand Small Elephants = because, what has a hat= what, when has a hen = when

Play 'I Spy' and 'Hangman', which encourage use of sounds and spellings.

Encourage your child to learn spelling patterns and phonic spellings. Write the spelling in sentences with accurate punctuation and practise high frequency words and handwriting. Also, ensure your child completes homework on time, take an interest in what they are doing and praise their efforts.

Confident Writers

Help your child write a letter to their favourite author. Details can be found on the internet.

As with early writers be aware of occasions when children can be involved in writing – shopping lists, cards, phone messages, notes to friends, invitations to family occasions, emailing friends, blogging, texting (be aware of e-safety).

Write information pages or booklets about a hobby or something they find interesting e.g. dinosaurs, class topics, sports stars etc. Illustrate and label. Encourage use of paragraphs for blocks of information.

Write postcards from holidays and record holiday events in a diary, which can be shared with friends or family.

Provide your child with a comfortable place to work and exciting writing materials. A dictionary or spell check on a computer would also be useful.

Let your child see you being a model writer but also let them see that you are not perfect! Checking, making changes and editing what you write are a natural part of writing.

After your child has produced written homework, ask them to proof read their work for accuracy. After they have done this, look at a piece yourself.

Ask your child what his/her writing targets are and help them to work on these.

Read books to, and with them, which are at a higher level than their own reading to expose them to ambitious vocabulary and complex sentence structure.

Encouraging Reluctant Writers

If your child has barriers towards writing, or low self-esteem as a writer, praising and valuing your child's writing is very important. Your child may need support when they write and may need you to talk through their ideas first and help with composing and structure. Young children often need help with ideas to write their news/diary.

Help your child to go over problem spellings. It is extremely frustrating for children to have to battle with spelling and handwriting when they want to get their ideas down on paper. Knowing high frequency spellings will aid the flow of writing and enable the use of vocabulary rich language. Encourage children to sound out and have a go at more tricky words or give them the spellings.

Remember that writing does not have to be tricky or boring!

Writing for real purpose is more meaningful and rewarding for children and creates a fun and interesting way for children to develop their handwriting skills.

Have fun learning together!