

Niki Buchan, our pedagogical leader and educational consultant, will be sharing a series of articles on child development and developmentally appropriate opportunities for your young children. You are welcome to [contact Niki](#) for more information, to ask questions or share ideas. Visit her [website](#) or [Facebook](#) page for more information.

From the moment your baby is born, he knows what he needs to do for his personal learning and development. Mostly he needs to move, the more opportunities for movement, the more he will develop. The best place for a baby not able to crawl yet, is on the carpet or the floor where he can practice his movements safely. Watching a baby practice is fascinating, look at all the practice that goes into the first roll over or into crawling. The perseverance he shows in doing the same movements over and over and over again, and then the surprised thrill when he suddenly find himself in a new position!

Throughout early childhood such amazing achievements happen naturally when we provide an environment where children can practice their skills.

Life Readiness - Learning to write and draw

Some may call this school readiness, I prefer life readiness as we support children in their life long journey. Children who see adults using tools to write will be curious to have a go themselves, their delight at finding that their own movements can actually cause a mark on paper or in the sand is an 'I did' it moment to celebrate. He will enjoy the experience and keep coming back to it, all the time practicing and developing the muscles in his arm and hand. It is important not to rush through his individual stage but to let him practice as much as he wants to using a variety of tools and media such as sticks, crayons, paint and texters on paper, wood, glass, sand, mud. Experimenting on furniture and walls would not be welcomed although this expresses his desire the practice on lots of media - you can provide the variety and discourage furniture and wall painting!

- Stage 1: children between about 12 months and 2 and a half years will not be writing or drawing yet but will be experimenting with the joy of making marks. We often refer to these as scribbles and the movement comes from large movements of the shoulder with children often holding the crayon, texter or stick in their fist.
- Stage 2: children from about 2 to 3 years will have developed more control of their muscles and movement and they will start to hold the tool between their thumb and pointer finger. Now the 'scribbling' is more controlled and starts to show repeated marks such as lines and open circles.
- Stage 3: from 2 1/2 to 3 1/2 years children start to realise that writing consists of lines, curves, dots. They may make such marks and then tell you what they have written. What a huge leap in literacy...to realise that words can be shown as squiggles!
- Stage 4: from about 3 years to 5 years children will start naming their drawings after drawing them; dog, cat, man, tree. It is a complex thinking skill to hold an image in their head and then to draw it, they will start to plan ahead and intentionally drawing a rainbow, flower or dinosaur. First drawings often come from rough circles shapes featuring suns with rays and round people with hair and arms sticking out of the circle. This ability to draw what they are thinking is a huge milestone in their literacy journey, they are now thinking in symbols! They realise that they can create a symbol that represents a person. This is when they often start recognising the

difference between a drawing and writing and they may draw a picture and then write some squiggles to label it. As you share this exciting development with your child, they will be motivated to do more and more, all the while practicing and developing skills.

- Stage 5: also from about 3 to 5 years children will start to experiment with letters in their writing, often starting with the letters in their name as well as pretend letters. I remember my children writing a line of squiggles that looked like letters but were not and then ask me to read what they have written! This is also the stage when they realise that words can be long or short.

How can you help?

- Provide many opportunities to develop core body strength by climbing, swinging, jumping, running, balancing, throwing.
- Provide opportunities to draw or write using large movements such as writing in the sand with a stick, using chalk outdoors on the pavement.
- Provide playdough, clothes pegs to open and close, to help develop the fine hand muscles.
- Offer many opportunities for creative mark making to develop small muscles in the hands and practice skills.
- Try not to 'test' your child by asking questions such as the colour or shape.
- Try not to praise what he has drawn but the effort, creativity, detail, colours used.
- Try not to get it wrong by asking what he has drawn, rather ask 'tell me about your picture'.
- Take writing seriously when he shows an interest in text by asking him to make a shopping list or a label in his own squiggles.
- Try not to criticise, laugh or correct but celebrate together.
- Enjoy time playing and making marks with your child.