
READY for SCHOOL Parent News: Encouraging an Early Interest in Writing

There are many ways that we can help encourage our children's interest in writing. Most importantly, model an interest in writing for your child. Whether you are making a shopping list, writing checks or recording a phone message, offer your child writing tools to use as well. If you are writing letters, offer your child paper, envelopes, writing utensils and stickers (for stamps) to also write. Your child may enjoy actually send her writings to family and friends. Take a mini-field trip to the post office to mail the letter. And maybe your child will even receive a letter in return.

Create a writing environment: To create an environment conducive to writing, have materials readily available in your home such as markers, crayons, fat pencils, etc. If your child is younger than four, you probably want to have these handy, but only make them available when you are there to supervise. Provide paper of varying textures, avoiding paper which is too thin and might tear. Children younger than four will do best with blank paper. Children ages four and five may enjoy using lined paper occasionally, although don't expect them to write within the lines. The lines can be used as a guide.

Document Stories: When your child tells stories, write the story down and later re-read it to your child. Your child can add illustrations. You may even want to have the story laminated to read over and over again. Or when your child draws a picture and then describes it to you, ask his or her permission to add that description in writing to the drawing. You can later go back to these and re-read them together with your child. This helps children understand the value of writing and that written words can also be spoken.

Computer writing: Much of the writing we do today is on the computer. When you are sending emails and your child is close by, explain to your child what you are doing. While children three and older will also enjoy opportunities to write on the computer, make sure that they have plenty of opportunities for writing on paper as well.

Involve your child in "real" writing: Ask him to sign his name (or simply make a mark for younger children) on a birthday card you are sending or on his own party invitation. Or encourage your older children (four or five year old) to start a "journal" of what she did on a trip or special event or simply document what happens daily as tulips emerge in your front yard, for example. Journal writing can be a combination of "invented spelling" (your child sounds out how she thinks words are spelled without corrections) along with dictation that you record. Both are equally useful.

Have fun supporting the development of your young writer.