“From Scribbles to Sentences”

Although formal teaching of the writing process begins in school, fundamental prewriting skills are developed at home with the preschooler. Since writing is largely an act of discovery, children cannot develop writing strategies without plenty of meaningful opportunities to write. Young children need to practice and be exposed to writing so that they will successfully write (trace, copy and ultimately compose) when they are ready.

What parents can do to provide models of writing and nurture enthusiasm for the writing process:

Read to young children:

By reading to children on a daily basis and pointing out the written word, children learn that the *writing* in a book, not just the pictures, is the means to hearing a good story.

Label items:

Using opportunities to write on children’s belongings teaches young ones that print makes messages that are useful in their surroundings. This is especially important to twins who want ownership of possessions such as toys, crayons, shoes, backpacks, etc.

Write in the children’s presence:

Parents should be observed writing to show that it is a valuable part of human communication. Pointing out a note to Dad left on the kitchen table, verbalizing the process of compiling a food shopping list, gathering the family to sign a get well card or quietly taking notes in church are all simple examples of how parents can be model writers.

Provide writing materials for prewriters:

Children under four years old will do fine seated in their highchairs with crayons, washable markers and scrap paper such as used holiday cards, old office memos and junk mail. Once children can sit safely and responsibly for a brief time (3-4 yrs) pencils, pens, thin markers and unlined computer paper are a good addition to their writing supplies.

Suggest that your young children write:

Giving children the opportunity and expectation to “write” in situations when an adult would normally be writing sets up the positive and safe environment that young writers need. Making a card to bring to a birthday party, writing a note to buy more cereal when the box is empty and listing the stores to go to at the mall are activities that accomplish this goal.

When learning to talk, newborns hear people speaking for at least ten months before they are able to utter, “babadada”. Considering how much language they have absorbed in that amount of time, one could almost expect them to say, “Wow Mom, I can finally speak, I have so much I want to tell you!” The slow and deliberate acquisition of language, however, is expected and nurtured. Parents can expect the same progress in the area of writing. Because much writing development unfolds in children well before they spell or compose, their early attempts are mostly lines and squiggles. There are many steps and phases between the first scribble and the child’s eventual sophisticated use of the written language. Helping early writers develop a sense of confidence, a desire to take risks and a bold enthusiasm will surely help them travel the amazing journey from scribbles to sentences.

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