

Simple advice on helping an infant child with writing

Writing is a very complex skill. In fact it takes most of us our whole school-life to fully master it and we should try not to underestimate this as we help our young school-going children get started with learning to write.

Start with talking: Believe it or not, learning to form letters is the easy part of writing. Thinking clearly and expressing their ideas is far more important for young writers and much harder to achieve. The best way to get there is to talk to your child and, crucially, listen when they speak!

Provide opportunities for writing: Try to provide a small writing and drawing area (an upturned box?) for your child somewhere in your home. Ideally they are able to sit at this whenever they want, and have access to scrap paper, pencils, crayons, felt-tips, scissors, sellotape™ or glue.

Reluctant writers: Even the most reluctant writers enjoy new kinds of writing such as drawing on the ground outside with chalk, or on windows with special window-crayons, or even using bath crayons. Likewise, make it possible for your child to engage in writing or drawing in his play - after all pirates often need treasure maps, footballers need results tables and every astronaut could use a well kitted out cardboard rocket.

The idea's the thing: When you look at some of your child's writing, try not to focus first on the handwriting. The message this communicates is that you value how her writing looks far more than what it says. Now of course presentation and legible handwriting are VERY important but they are not as important as having a good idea and phrasing it well!

A helping hand: 'You do it for me!' Every child lacks confidence at some point as they start out learning to write. There isn't any harm in showing your child how to write or draw something every now and then but ask them to help you as you do so. 'What sounds can you hear at the end of the word?'

Keeping it real: If children can see that writing has a real purpose they are far more likely to be interested in mastering it. Involve your child in writing birthday card messages, ask him to make a don't-forget note to stick on the front door, get him to mark important dates on the calendar.