



CARE & NATURAL LEARNING

Guidance for Families Home with Young Children

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Learning Symbols: When children grow up in a rich print world, they naturally pick up the understanding that symbols carry meanings. They tune into environmental print of everyday life – they can read the **T** for the Target sign when we go shopping, or they notice the **S** for the stop sign when they are riding in the car. The best approach to helping children learn symbols such as **A-B-Cs** and **1-2-3s** is through natural play and daily life. The most meaningful print for children in preschool is their own name, the names of their friends, and the names of their family members.

Celebrate scribbles and marks: Pretending to write is a wonderful stage of life. Children make scribbles, marks, designs and zig zag lines. There is no hurry to write real letters – in fact too much focus on writing letters correctly can be discouraging to preschool aged children. They should have the freedom to use tools like markers, paint, and pencils, but we do not ask them to trace or form letters perfectly. Doing so would be like asking babies to walk before they crawl. We marvel at the scribbles of children just like we celebrated their first babbles and coos when they were learning how to talk.

Be a scribe for your child: Sometimes children will become interested in writing their own name or forming special words and messages, but always keep in mind that children’s imagination and intellect are far beyond their mechanical skills, so they can tell elaborate stories and say **BIG** words long before they have the skills to write those words and ideas. It can become laborious and burdensome to expect a preschool child to write out long sentences or make words “correctly”. That’s why it is really great when adults can act as scribes. Adults can write down children’s words, catch their stories, and take dictation. Being a child scribe is a role preschool teachers cherish.

Developing mechanics: Keep in mind that **PLAY** is the best way to develop the fine motor skills, hand eye coordination, strength, and dexterity that children need to become writers. What this means is that using a shovel to dig in the sand box, holding a paint brush to paint at the easel, building with legos, doing puzzles, manipulating clay or dough are all early writing activities. Pencils can be fun, but preschool is not the time to over-focus on paper, pencil and seat work. When children are using their hands for messy dynamic creative play they are gaining all the skills they need to be readers and writers.

Here is a [6 minute talk](#) about **ABC stones** and making a **secret code treasure hunt**.

