



Parent Pages



Resources for Christian Parents in the 21st Century

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Start Write!

Every great speaker began as a babbler, and every great author began with a scribble. Learning how to write starts from the moment a child can grasp a pencil or crayon. You might assume that everything a child learns about writing happens at school, but this is not the case. Parents model writing, provide materials, give feedback and encourage children to write. If this is not done at home, a child comes to school at a distinct disadvantage in learning how to read and write.

As early as 18–24 months, children have seen family members write and can grasp a pencil to make their own marks. It is not easy to see the connection between those scribbles and a well-crafted story, but scribbling is part of the exploration and preparation for writing. Even early scribbles practice the horizontal, vertical and circular lines needed to write letters. As children become more literate, their scribbling begins to resemble writing and may even include spaces between “words.” At this stage, it is good for you to write for your child and say aloud the words you are writing. You can begin by writing your child’s name on his scribble drawings. This tells the child that writing is important, giving a hint of the connection between talking and writing.

Once a child has learned to write her name, she will move into a stage of writing that involves letters. Early on, the letters will be random, and most “words” will be spelled with the letters of the child’s name. Early spelling is evident when the child begins to label things with the beginning sound. Ending sounds and vowels will come next as the child is able to hear and represent the sounds of

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a word. While incorrect spellings can make a parent a bit nervous, they are an indication that the child is using writing to learn to read.

It is okay to give spelling feedback. If a child asks for a word, it is best to write it down so he can see it. Keep in mind that “sounding-out” spellings have their place. When a child spells “is” as “iz,” it is a correct spelling in terms of the sounds. Conventional spelling becomes more frequent as the child reads more. This is a great age to play a look-and-find game with common words. For example, while waiting for the church service to begin, circle the word “Jesus” in the church bulletin, and let your child find the word on other pages.

It is exciting when a child has enough knowledge of writing to begin to write sentences; stories cannot be far behind. At first, children may indicate spaces between words with dots or dashes but will eventually drop this practice. Ask your child to read her story to you. This allows her to see when she has omitted a word and also relieves you of the pressure of decoding. Save these early manuscripts and watch how grammar and spelling

improve over a relatively short time. Ask your child questions about the writing to encourage him to expand the story. This will help your child develop abstract thinking as he considers the viewpoint of the reader.

In early writing, it is not much of a concern when children reverse letters or even write entire words backwards. Just as they are experimenting with making lines and spelling words,

they are also learning directionality. The more they write and see you writing, the sooner they will perceive the rules of writing. When children stretch the rules of writing, they are testing a hypothesis made about rules they have observed. Then they go about comparing what they have written to what others have done. This helps them to refine their rules and improve their writing. All of this helps to build focus and to support problem-solving skills.

As your child becomes more comfortable with writing, it is good practice to encourage her to write, and challenge her to try new things. Young children love lists and labeling things on a map. Older children can be encouraged to write stories and directions. Any child who can write his name is old enough to help with writing thank-you notes. Even a preschool-aged child can benefit from dictating a note. This kind of purposeful writing develops good manners while also giving writing and reading practice.

A word search on the word “write” in the Bible gives an indication of the importance of this activity. God wrote His law on our hearts, inspired the writers of the Bible to record His word and encourages us to write His word as we teach our children. This shows how important writing and reading God’s Word is to faith development.

“Let not steadfast love and faithfulness forsake you; bind them around your neck; write them on the tablet of your heart” (Proverbs 3:3).

For further study

For some great ideas on supporting a strong writing habit in children: www.nwp.org/cs/public/print/doc/resources/help_write.csp



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