



Early Writing for Children with SLD

Introduction

Learning to write involves more than simply forming letters and spelling. The child needs to understand that writing has a purpose (i.e. communicating to others in the form of birthday cards and letters, reminders for ourselves such as shopping lists). They will also learn that writing takes different forms (a letter looks very different to a list) and usually follows a format (a story has a beginning middle and end). In the early stages of writing it is important to remember that both the marks made by the child and the story dictated to an adult have value and build an understanding of writing for that child.

Ideas for Letter Formation

This is the act of physically making marks. When asking the child to do this consider how easy it is to see the mark that is made and whether the child can apply the pressure needed (a pencil requires more pressure than a pen and making a mark on a whiteboard is easier than on paper as the pen will glide). Also allow plenty of opportunity for making marks in non-traditional materials such as sand, glitter, shaving foam and cornflour and water.

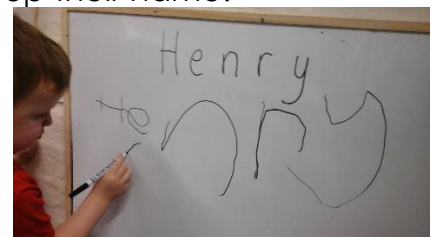
There are 8 different marks which children need to form in order to be able to write letters. For students with Severe Learning Difficulties and/or motor difficulties, these will need to be taught discretely and across media including pens, crayons and messy materials.



Children should also have lots of opportunities to express themselves through drawing. Most young children will first assign a picture meaning to marks when asked ("my family", "Spiderman"). Drawing will develop the fine motor skills and creativity needed for writing.



The most significant word for a child is their name and they should be given plenty of opportunities to practice this. An easy opportunity is labelling any work they produce. Allow them to copy from a name card as they learn to recall the letter shapes which make up their name.



Ideas for Emergent writing

For typically developing children, emergent writing is the first step they take in learning to write. This is when they begin to understand that writing has meaning and is a form of communication. It will usually begin a lines of scribble to which the child will assign meaning ("shopping list"). The child will then begin to include letter shapes within the scribble and spaces to create words. The activities described below could also be used by adults modelling writing.

Ask children to create a list for shopping or the objects in box or cupboard.



On special occasions such as birthdays, Mothers' Day or religious festivals encourage children to write a card for a family member or friend.



During role play such as a café or doctor's surgery, give opportunities to write. This could be orders from customers or prescriptions.



Ideas for modelling writing

Sometime children have a lot to say, more than they could write, at these times scribing is important to record their voice. Modelling writing, such as group writing where ideas are shared and sentence structure can be modelled and improved, also allows us to show good writing practice. The activities described below could also be used for emergent writing.

When retelling known stories or creating their own the verbal or alternative communication skills of children with Severe Learning Difficulties are likely to be greater than their writing ability. Scribing for the child allows them to say all they want to. A good example of this would be when ordering pictures from a story.



After a visit, a cookery activity, making a model or similar exciting activity, we will often ask children to write about the experience. For children with Severe Learning Difficulties, looking at photos, ordering them and describing them whilst an adult writes would be appropriate.



N.B. We often ask children to copy our writing, this can be a helpful model (see name writing), however it can also prevent our learners from engaging in emergent writing. Consider why the child is copying and the value of this.

And don't forget technology

Technology is all around us and children are often more likely to see adults typing on a phone or computer than using pen and paper. It is important that they also have to opportunity to use and benefit from technology.

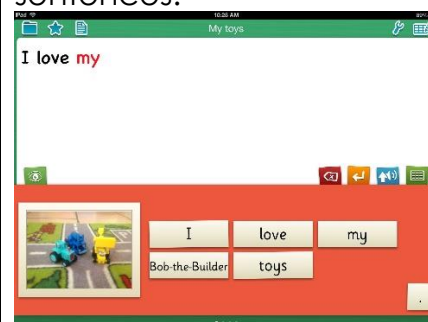
Allow the child to type using a word processing package. This may produce emergent type writing or the careful finding and typing of significant letters such as those in their name or the names of family and friends.



The App *Our Story* is free to download and can be used to create books using photos, text and sound recording. This is useful for retelling such as stories or events. PowerPoint can be used in similar ways.



Clicker can be used in many ways to support writing. It's word banks are available with pictures to support the early stages of reading and writing. Words can be selected to build sentences.



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