



# It's Child's Play!

## A Guide to Early Years Mark Making & Pre-Writing

Children will imitate adults, grasping writing tools and making marks on paper or any surface that is available!

These early scribbles need to be nurtured and guided in order to develop a confident and evolving hand as they form the basis for the handwriting which will develop



**Charnwood**  
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# Mark Making and Writing

Writing should be seen as an enjoyable fun experience. Developing a child's mark making skills in the early years will allow them to learn to control a pencil in such a way that it becomes automatic. In so doing 100% of their attention can shift to generating text!

Learning to hold a pencil and make marks that ultimately lead to writing is a complex development.

Children move through stages in their mark making. In the early stages it is a physical activity. The child grasps tools with their whole hand in a palmar grip moving their arm from the shoulder. The first recognisable objects are usually human figures.

Gradually muscle control becomes more defined. Features are added to figures such as arms (often projecting from the head) then a body, fingers, toes, clothes and hair.



Initially children form lines and dots



They then develop the ability to imitate a directional mark made by others



Gradually curves and enclosures emerge (enclosures made anti-clockwise are a pre-requisite for forming letters)



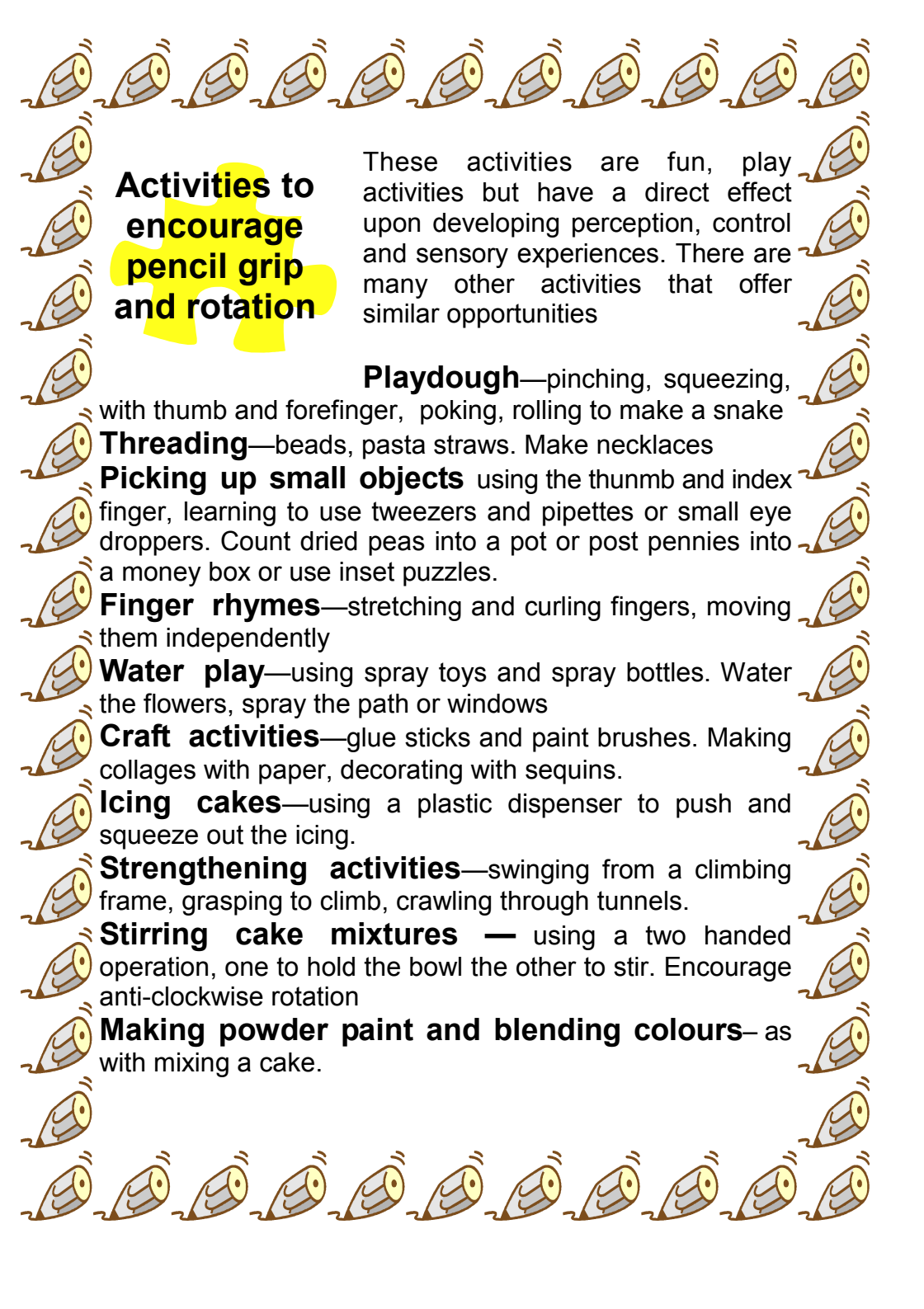
Children then develop the ability to copy straight lines and curves made by others



Finally they develop the ability to use straight lines and curves to form symbols

Developing the pencil grip, referred to as a tripod grip, also takes time. Children need to develop the strength in their hands, fingers and wrists. They need to be able to move their fingers separately, to use a pincer grip (using their thumb and index finger). Their wrists and thumb need to be strong. Finally they need to learn to rest their wrist on a table and to use their non-dominant hand to hold the paper still. To execute successful writing the side of the hand needs to slide along the paper

Stages of  
early  
mark  
making



## Activities to encourage pencil grip and rotation

These activities are fun, play activities but have a direct effect upon developing perception, control and sensory experiences. There are many other activities that offer similar opportunities

**Playdough**—pinching, squeezing, with thumb and forefinger, poking, rolling to make a snake

**Threading**—beads, pasta straws. Make necklaces

**Picking up small objects** using the thumb and index finger, learning to use tweezers and pipettes or small eye droppers. Count dried peas into a pot or post pennies into a money box or use inset puzzles.

**Finger rhymes**—stretching and curling fingers, moving them independently

**Water play**—using spray toys and spray bottles. Water the flowers, spray the path or windows

**Craft activities**—glue sticks and paint brushes. Making collages with paper, decorating with sequins.

**Icing cakes**—using a plastic dispenser to push and squeeze out the icing.

**Strengthening activities**—swinging from a climbing frame, grasping to climb, crawling through tunnels.

**Stirring cake mixtures** — using a two handed operation, one to hold the bowl the other to stir. Encourage anti-clockwise rotation

**Making powder paint and blending colours**— as with mixing a cake.

**Mark Making** - this should go beyond pencil and paper and include a range of textures and media



Paint using an easel and large brushes



Paint the paving stones/ flags with water



Draw shapes in the air with a wand



Dance with a ribbon in your writing hand



Chalk on boards or dark coloured sugar paper



Draw in the sand



Finger paint on the table with cold water paste and powder paints



Make rubbings on rough surfaces



Draw in cornflour 'slime'



Make a tactile display with objects and materials that the child can change or move.



Use tactile natural materials for example wood, suede, hessian, fur, twigs, shells, moss, leaves, flowers, pebbles, feathers etc.

**Activities to  
encourage  
Mark  
Making**

Little children's scribbles and drawings are their way of communicating and sharing observation of their world. The adults role is to encourage, praise and celebrate their achievements.