

## Emergent Writing

Narrator: Welcome to this presentation of the 15-minute In-Service Suite on Emergent Writing. This presentation describes what emergent writing looks like in young children and shares practical ways that you can begin to support emergent writing at home and in early childhood programs.

The framework for effective practice, or house framework, helps us think about the elements needed to support children's preparation and readiness for school. The elements are the foundation, the pillars, and the roof. When connected to one another, they form a single structure that surrounds the family in the center, because as we implement each component of the house in partnership with parents and families, we foster children's learning and development.

Implementing research-based curricula and effective teaching practices helps support children as they develop the skills necessary to engage in emergent writing. This presentation on emergent writing is one in a series of modules designed to help adults support young children as they learn positive behaviors, develop skills in STEAM, math, and writing, and engage in dramatic play.

Learning to write goes beyond the process of proper spelling and grammar. Writing is a means of written communication that can be understood by others because it follows a particular set of shared rules. Children as young as 2 years begin to understand that text has meaning and can be used to express ideas, feelings, and stories. Emergent writing is children's earliest attempt at written communication.

In its earliest stages, writing looks like scribbling and drawing and eventually begins to include letters of the alphabet, invented spelling, conventional spelling, and basic grammar. Most children go through predictable key stages on the path to emergent writing. However, as with nearly all areas of child development, children progress at different paces and may often display skills across multiple stages at the same time. Thus, the stages we present here are guidelines for teachers and home visitors to support individual children's efforts to communicate in writing and develop their skills.

In the earliest stages of writing development, children's writing does not include the intentional use of letters, but instead resembles scribbling or drawings. At first, children make random marks and attach no meaning to them, but later, the child intends the marks to be writing that conveys a message.

You can support the earliest stages of writing by providing children with a variety of writing materials and implements and encouraging their use. Don't be afraid to let children explore making different kinds of marks on paper, or other writing surfaces.

If your children can talk, be sure to ask them questions about their drawing and model writing skills by writing down what children say under their picture. Equally important is revisiting their drawings and what they said about their drawings the next day. This helps instill the idea that writing is read the same way each time and its meaning doesn't change.

In the middle stages of writing development, children begin to understand that there are rules to writing that are unique to their home language. These rules include using letters, symbols, and characters and following the directional order of writing, such as top to bottom and left to right. During this stage, children write their names but may not yet make the connection between the letters they write and their specific letter sound.

In the late stages of writing development, which may emerge in the late preschool years, children intentionally use letters to represent particular phonetic sounds. We often refer to this as "invented spelling" because it's based on what the child hears. Eventually, the child learns conventional spelling, including the irregularities in words, such as silent "Es" at the end of words like "cake." They also begin to write short phrases and begin to follow grammatical rules, such as using punctuation and starting sentences with uppercase letters.

Supporting the middle and later stages of writing usually begins by helping children write their names. This experience helps children to learn that strings of letters have meaning, a purpose, and are associated with particular sounds.

Teachers and other staff, as well as family members, can also serve as intentional writing models throughout the day, carefully pointing out the process of writing or practicing sounding out or spelling a word. Importantly, teachers and parents can provide authentic opportunities for peer scaffolded and independent writing across the day.

We can support the emergent writing of all children by first remembering that we're supporting a process, not an outcome. This process supports a child's school readiness, since writing skills develop across the primary school years and beyond. It's important to take the time to identify if a child is in the beginning, middle, or later stages of writing, in order to provide the proper support and learning experiences to help them develop in this area. Having a sense of what stage of writing a child is in will help you to anticipate potential problems with writing, as well as what you can do to help children grow and develop.

We hope you have new ideas to expand on the ways teachers can create environments and activities to support emergent writing skills. For more information and more ideas, see the complete 15-minute Suite on emergent writing and take a look at our tips and tools and helpful resources.