

10 tips to engage all children in mark-making

As practitioners, we know that mark-making is a fundamental part of the early year's curriculum. Not only does it support children's fine motor development, but it also enables them to develop the skills needed for writing.

Some children really enjoy mark making and will gravitate to these activities easily, whereas other children may prefer other activities or avoid them.

The following tips will help you to encourage all children to engage with mark-making.

1. Provide a range of fun and exciting resources available for mark-making, including pens, pencils, chinks, crayons, feathers, sticks, brushes, dabbers, paper of different shapes and sizes, mirrors, walls, pieces of card, envelopes, tickets and boards. The opportunities are endless
2. Engage children by linking in with their interests. Children who opt out of using an ordinary pencil may jump at the chance to use a special Spiderman or pirate pencil. Try offering special letter headed paper or using a spray bottle filled with paint to make a superhero
3. Further to this, consider what motivates children. For example, a child interested in construction may not like to make marks with a pen but may love to use real whittling tools to create marks in wood (when risk assessed)
4. Ensure that the mark-making tools are of good quality to encourage use by the children. There is nothing engaging about dried up pens or unsharpened pencils! Make it part of your daily routine to check and replenish creative stocks
5. Ensure there are mark-making opportunities across all aspects of the environment, both indoors and outdoors. Some examples might be making tickets for the train set, creating maps for construction, drawing menus for the role-play café or writing letters home. Consider the use of ICT and how this can be used to support mark-making. For example, using painting app/games
6. Create exciting ways to mark-make with different textures. It doesn't have to be on paper. Marks in the sand/salt tray, prints in the dough, water and paintbrushes on the wall outside, finger marks in spilt water, painting on Clingfilm attached to table legs, chalk under tables, twigs in the mud, are all equally important and great examples
7. Display plenty of 'real' print in the environment, such as packaging, signs and letters. Talk to children about the different marks they can see, read letters to them, point out marks in stories and encourage them to make marks, label and name what they are doing. This could include making a sign for their construction building or creating a thank you note to the nursery cook



8. Praise all mark-making creations and give positive feedback, valuing the process over the end product and building confidence in the children
9. Dedicate a place in your setting where children can display their mark-making creations or photographs of what they have done. Encourage the children to tell you, and others, what they have done. Share these with other children, professionals and parents
10. Share the importance of mark-making and all the different ways to do this at home with parents/carers too.