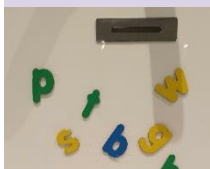


Play Ideas

Supporting mark making

There are many ways to support the development of mark making. Some of these ideas might be motivating for children who need more encouragement and practise to build their skills and confidence. Other ideas take a more considered approach around physical, sensory and possible 'safety' issues.

Bath or shower play



Bathtime can be a great time to try out finger paints or bath crayons, on the bath/shower side. A child might like to put paint on themselves and this can be a lovely sensory activity. Sticking foam shapes/letters/numbers on the bath/shower wall might be more appealing to other children. You could make your own paints with sensitive shaving foam and food colouring but remember to test them out with a small bit first, for any sensitivity. You could make up a song e.g. 'Put the paint on your knees, on your knees' to the tune of 'If you are happy and you know it'.

Food and messy play



Food and messy play can be motivating for children because it's such a sensory experience but for some children it can be more of a challenge. Perhaps try these activities first where they don't have to touch the messy material. Over time they may become more confident.



Objects can be pushed into materials to make marks. Try using the end of a spoon, rim of a cup, a spatula, pastry cutters, a sieve, potato masher, etc. into materials like a tray with sieved icing sugar, flour, pastry, playdough, gloop, sand, gel, mud, lentils, etc. You could also try small world figures, vehicles or rollers to make tracks and 'footprints'.

Let the child see you handling the messy mixtures yourself. Have fun but not too much as a child may only be able to tolerate this for a short time.



To help them get used to handling the materials encourage them to make the mixture up and pour it out themselves.

Use tubes of readymade icing or make your own to mark make on a plate, your hands, biscuits, etc. Squishy cream could be used in the same way if icing is too strong a taste for a child.

There are some good ideas in [Messy play and adventures with food](#), [Messy Play](#) and [Play Ideas: Food Glorious Food!](#) Some children may really struggle with messy play, so try 'safe' ideas and come back to it another time.

'Safe' mark making



Materials like paint, shaving foam, gloop, a mix of oil and coloured water, lentils, etc. can be contained in a sealed food bag. Secure the end with strong tape. These can be handled or taped to a table or wall if a child is likely to bite or mouth them. Putting a strong coloured paper or a mirror underneath the bag helps to show up marks made with a finger. You can make the bags more motivating by adding 'treasure', sequins, very small toys, beads, buttons, etc. that you might have around the house.



Some children love the feel of 'Mermaid' sequined material and love to stroke them back and forth and see the colour change. An Etch A Sketch/Magna doodle, etc. are all easy to make marks on and safe to leave about. Try taping a paint pen/soft crayon to toy vehicle so that when it is pushed over paper it leaves a mark.



Water play



Water drawing mats can be used with wet hands, feet or stampers. If a child is able to hold a brush, using the ones which you can fill up with water can make the activity more accessible. The brush itself could also be used to 'paint' hands and feet - but not everyone will like this 😊

You could use 'magic painting' books, where a picture emerges when you simply paint with water. Try covering a blackboard with chalk and then using a wet finger or a brush/sponge to make marks or even wash it all off.

Outdoor play

Pavement chalk is easy to use for little and huge marks, doesn't need a flat surface and washes off easily. If your child is reluctant to make marks, they might be motivated to wash yours off with an old paintbrush and water. You can gather a selection of everyday mark making 'tools' from around the house e.g. bubble makers, old brushes/sponges, squeeze/spray bottles or bath toys that squirt water. Experiment with different sizes and squeeze pressures to find out what they like best. Water is also a clean and safe way to mark make on fences, paving stones or walls. If you have snow, try spray bottles with food colouring. You can then walk in the coloured snow and make coloured footprints too! Here is a [Bumps2Bairns](#) post on [Rainbow Snow](#) and try [Play Ideas: Making and following tracks](#) for more outdoor mark making ideas.



Mark making tools



Some first marks may not be that rewarding for a child if they are unable to apply enough pressure to get a good visual result. Tentative marks can be much more visible if you use paint filled pens, oil-based crayons, etc. Try a variety to achieve easy success and find the ones the child likes best. Sometimes different shapes can be easier to hold; stampers, egg shaped crayons, etc.

Surfaces

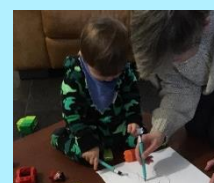


Some children like having a specific area just for mark making; a small table, a mat and a place to keep all their 'tools'. If you have two children sharing the same space it can help to use masking/electrical tape to create an area for each of them to work in. For children who struggle to sit, try an easel or changing the surface altogether e.g. tape some paper under a table. They can find a comfy position, on cushions, and make marks from there. To add interest, try things like sandpaper and crayon, mark making on foil. Pressing with a hand or finger can leave interesting marks on heavily textured paper/wallpaper. Putting bubble wrap under paper gives a different sensation and result. Marks can easily be made on a small white/chalkboard with a water-based pen/chalk. 'Washing off' also makes marks.

Interaction



You can model all these activities for a child in a playful way so there is no expectation that they will 'get it right'. It's about having fun making any kind of mark. You could model making a 'shopping list', a note for someone, writing a card, etc. Give them the tools to copy you and make their own marks. You can play games like 'cat and mouse chase' on a roll of old wallpaper. Just have fun making marks without worrying what it looks like.



Using technology



Some Apps like: '[Fluidity](#)' can be really motivating. When you touch the screen, it makes new colours as it swirls away from your finger/hand. '[Finger Paint](#)' can be played with music or sound effects. The sound stops when you stop making marks. Any touch gives a result and you can change colours and rub out marks with the squeaky rubber.



An Ultraviolet, LED torch can leave a silhouette on a photoluminescent board. The image will fade and then the board can be used over and over again. A bright torch might also work. Try using your hand, favourite toys, teddy or different shapes from around the house to make fun silhouettes.

Links

[Play@Home Activity Sheets](#): lots of recipes and ideas, produced by Care and Learning Alliance.

[Play and Leisure functional/manipulative play](#): Arts and crafts activities from [NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde/KIDS](#).
[Ideas for developing fine motor skills](#)