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Colouring Development

Colouring is an important stage in developing pencil skills and can be used to develop pencil grasp, pencil pressure, pencil control and an awareness of boundaries. Whilst many young children enjoy picking up a crayon or pencil and making marks with it, the skill of colouring within the lines requires practise and some children may find this challenging. Understanding the different stages a child passes through when developing the skill of colouring can be helpful and we've detailed some top tips to help along the way.



Stages of Colouring Development

Stage 1

Your child may show an interest in making marks with a crayon, pencil or chalk and will experiment on different types of surfaces, e.g. paper, walls, tables. They will typically use whole arm movements to create the marks.

Top Tips

- Using short chubby crayons/pencils and chalk will help your child to develop their grip.
- Using chalk outside on the wall is great for developing your child's shoulder strength.
- Show your child where you're happy for them to use their pencils and crayons etc.

Stage 2

With some reinforcement from an adult, your child will start to develop an awareness that colouring should happen on paper. At this stage their colouring may become more targeted with an attempt to colour an object, but there will be no regard for the lines and pencil strokes and lines will be random, and without regard for colour.

Top Tips

- Continue to reinforce the surfaces you want your child to make their marks on.
- Help your child to develop pressure by colouring on different textured surfaces.
- Colour in pictures together or with other family members.
- Talk to your child about colour, draw their attention to colours when you are out on walks or when they are playing.
- Play some colour sorting games

Stage 3

Your child will develop more pencil control and will start to use strokes in different directions. They will start to show an understanding of the boundaries of the pictures, but may not yet have the pencil control to stay fully within the lines. At this stage they will start to show some understanding of the use of colour and may begin to start using colour appropriately.





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Top Tips

- Talk about what colours your child has chosen, but accept their choice even if it seems unusual!
- Direct your child to different areas of the picture to colour, and ask “what colour shall we do...?”
- Gently encourage your child to fill the space “Don’t forget to colour here” (pointing to the space)
- If you want to encourage greater accuracy it’s better to use sharpened pencils rather than crayons.

Stage 4

Your child will now have developed enough pencil control to colour in various stroke directions. They will have an understanding on how to ‘fill’ the space without leaving too many gaps and the colouring will start to look more ordered. Your child will be more specific about the colours they choose and will more often than not use them appropriately.



Top Tips!

- Continue to colour together, ask your child to look at your colouring and see if you’ve missed any bits. Use this as a way to show your child what filling the space looks like.
- Keep areas to be coloured small and achievable, so that their colouring attempts are successful. You can gradually increase the size of the pictures as their patience and skill develops.
- If you want to try a bigger picture, break it up and colour by numbers. Your child can help choose the colours.
- Ask your child to look at your colouring and see if you’ve stayed in the lines. Show them that adults sometimes go out of the lines too and that’s ok.
- Here are some ways to help your child understand the lines as boundaries without drawing attention to their mistakes
 - Go over the lines with a piece of string before colouring, this helps them develop their sense of boundary as it becomes a physical boundary on the page.
 - Cut out a simple picture to colour and stick it to a coloured background. This will give your child a clear idea of the space they have to fill.
 - Laminate a coloured page and cut out simple shapes. Place some white paper under the laminated page and encourage your child to colour within the shapes.
 - Practise drawing around objects, templates or even their hand and let them see the boundary that they have created. Encourage them to colour this in.
 - Use an HB pencil for drawing and colouring pencils for colouring in. This way, your child’s drawing and boundary lines are always visible even if their colouring is not accurate.