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Seven Sparkling Ways to Encourage Kids' Writing

It's natural for young children to bubble over with ideas, schemes, and jokes. Unfortunately, capturing those ideas on paper is not so natural for many kids with learning disabilities (LD). They may freeze up, forget their ideas, or fight the pencil.

Help Your Reluctant Writer at Home

Your struggling writer needs practice at home, but you don't want to make it seem like another school chore. The answer is to sneak writing into play — and vice versa.

As Joseph Pearce says in *The Magical Child*, "The child can never learn to play without the parent playing with the child. Play ... is a huge creative potential built within the child, which never develops unless it is stimulated by the adult model, the parent."

Remember that your role as a home writing coach is to have fun and to honor your child's imagination. You don't have to be the drill sergeant in charge of spelling. In fact, research shows us that in the long run, it's far more important to encourage the communication of ideas than to hamper a child's style for the sake of correct spelling.

The root of the word "communication" is "to commune" — in other words, to coax the ideas in your child's brain down through the paper and up into your brain. You can help by:

- Saying, "Let's play a game." There's no need to mention "writing game" if your child is a reluctant writer.
- Choosing subjects your child loves, like brontosaurus or monster movies or soccer or shoes.
- Talking through ideas, asking questions, and listening carefully to answers.
- Making drawings, notes, and story maps together, if your child can't remember ideas.
- Taking dictation or having your child use a computer.
- Praising honestly and liberally.
- Keeping games short.
- Posting written work on the wall or refrigerator, or sending it to family members and friends. Writing is meant to be shared.
- Quitting if it isn't fun for your child or for you.

Try These Games for Grades K-2

• Eat Your Words

The reluctant writer of any age often needs to return to the word level. Make it fun by baking dinner rolls or cookies in the shape of words that mean something to your child. For example, if she loves comic books, bend purchased dough into "Pow!" or "Shazam!" If it's her birthday, bake her wish, like "Gameboy II." (And if all this is too messy, use PlayDough or craft clay for words — but don't eat it.)

• Survival

Pretend you are stranded on an island somewhere in your apartment, house, garage, or local park. You need to write "Help!" so you will be rescued by planes that are searching for you. You don't have a pencil or paper (and if you did, the writing would be too tiny to be read from the air).

Tie towels around your head and take water (it's hot on the island). You and your child must survey your surroundings and invent non-pencil ways to write HELP! If you're in the bathroom, you might make giant letters out of toilet paper (and hope there's no wind). If you're in the garage, you might find paint and brushes. If you're in the park, you can always write with your toe in the playbox sand.

Suggest as little as possible, unless your child needs prompting. This game allows the child who balks at writing to experience the power of a single word when it is used for a reason. And if your child's imagination is fertile, don't stop at the first idea. Find as many ways as possible in each room or location.

