

Colouring In

Colouring in is the way children develop the muscle strength and stamina for the muscles we use to write. It is also a great way to develop eye hand control, and attention and focus to stay in the spatial lines. Whilst colouring is great for the muscles, colouring in does not actually help the motor plans for letter formation. It is more beneficial to think of colouring in as the ability to train the muscles like a gym session. Many children with weaker hand muscles avoid colouring in as they find it laborious and tiring.

Colouring in larger objects and pictures can seem overwhelming just like a marathon and for some children its not the muscle power that makes it seem like a marathon but the need for continued focus with eyes looking at their work. Colouring in large objects helps endurance, colouring in small objects helps to refine the static pencil grasp to one of dynamic control, as it means the wrist must stay stabilized and the fingers push and move the pencil in ever so small movements.

Like everything there is a natural progression with colouring ability.

Skills Progression

1. Child scribbles on page
2. Child makes one-direction movements back and forth in a large shape often overshooting the lines. Visual regard may be variable. May get stuck colouring in one section.
3. Child can use one direction colouring in to cover the shape with some overshooting but attempting to stay in the lines. Hand moves from area that has been coloured to a new white area. Child watching their hand more. May not entirely colour object.
4. Child able to colour in a shape and may start to change directions as they get to a corner or edge. Most shape is covered and stroke direction will change. Child usually always watching their hand.
5. Child anchors wrist and is easily able to move their fingers to adjust speed and direction of stroke to colour in. You can observe a change in ability to use long strokes in the middle of the object to smaller strokes near the edge. Stays within lines. Attentive.
6. Child changes colours within a colouring in picture and uses appropriate length and control of direction to neatly stay in the lines. May outline shape. Dynamic pencil strokes observed.

What to try:

Some children love colouring and will always engage, others are not so keen. If you need to develop this area start small and then keep expanding expectations. Make sure you know if it is the visual attention you need to promote or the endurance aspect. They need to learn to look first!

- Use textas as they are easier on the hand muscles than pencils or chalk.
- Try silkie crayons as they have a wonderful easy glide and are very easy to “push”
- Use a variety of novel colouring in methods such as bath crayons, highlighters and scented markers all to help stimulate interest. Colour in a tile in the bath with a bath crayon or a shape Mum has drawn.
- Try to use a template with a circle cut out of a ice cream lid so it can be put over the shape and they colour in within it as it reduces the overshooting and they can break the job down into a smaller chunk.
- Always start of with a smaller expectation e.g. you colour his hat and I will do his body. Tandem colouring in can help motivation.
- Colour in a big circle to use as a target to throw things at such as a ball, water balloons or use with water pistols so the colouring is followed by a more motivating game if they are reluctant.
- Try colouring in with edicol dye or food colouring and water and a paintbrush as also it gives maximum coverage for reduced effort. Painting also helps but if you are colouring make sure the brush is smaller.
- Use a glue pot with a paint colour added for gluing jobs as opposed to colouring jobs as you can get them to paste the glue everywhere before we stick and lots of kids enjoy gluing. Use blue glue as well for this visual focus to stay in the shape.
- Highlighters can give extra ease and interest as the neon colours are motivating. Officeworks and Crayola also put out colour changeable markers that change colours as you use them, which help with visual focus.
- Try masking tape on a wall in a shape or place on a black board and then paint with a paintbrush and water as this mimics colouring in.
- Use a song to hum or sing as they colour to help them keep the movement going. E.g. “slide and glide, slide and glide that’s how we get it done.” Or you can count and stop counting if they stop colouring.
- If they always go out of the lines use the template idea or you accentuate the line by outlining first or even try a waxed wikki stick to create a boundary, (sort of how we create a boundary when painting walls by putting up masking tape).

Remember start off with small amounts and gradually build up.



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