

Writing with Heart

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Heart-shaped paper, stickers and paper doilies littered the kitchen table. Glue, scissors and a whole box of markers did too. A class list of names lay on the table between Katie and her mom. Katie's mom had written 'TO' and left a space at the top of each heart and 'FROM' near the bottom. Katie had already printed her name on all 16 valentines but writing friends' names was hard. She wished more of them began with 'K'.

Katie was proud that she could print her own name. Her mom was too. She had overheard her mom telling Grandpa about Katie printing her ABCs. Her voice had an extra lift in it when she told him the news.

Katie prints letters others recognize, but Katie has been learning how to write for a very long time. At one year of age she was learning how to grasp writing tools and paper and by 18 months she was making marks on paper with chunky crayons. Scribbling fascinated Katie when she was a toddler. She could create crazy lines just by moving her arm, hand and a marker she held. Katie scribbled with a computer mouse too. Her mom found a site on the internet for scribble drawing. Katie loved it. The more Katie experimented with stubby crayons, markers, sidewalk chalk and the mouse, the better she became at controlling her movements.

One day Katie realized that pictures and marks on paper represented real objects. For weeks afterwards, she drew people with arms and legs sticking out of round heads. It wasn't long afterwards that her mom showed Katie how to use three stick markings to make a 'K'.

Katie's mom has been helping Katie develop writing skills without even realizing it. They rolled and cut playdough which strengthened Katie's hand muscles. The writing tools Katie used were washable and nontoxic. Katie's mom knew she could relax knowing Katie and her clothes would be perfectly fine when Katie experimented with drawing and writing.

Her mom talked to her about the marks she made and asked Katie to tell her about them. When Katie drew something that looked like a letter, her mom told Katie the name of the letter and posted her writing on the fridge, beside the grocery list. Katie's mom showed Katie that she made lists, wrote notes and cards too.

She also pointed out words and letters in books at story times. When Katie seemed interested in knowing more about the alphabet, her mom taught the letters in Katie's name first. She knew Katie would be excited to label and print the letters in her name.

She also made sure that Katie always had something available to write on – small notepads, big pieces of paper, the backs of recycled cereal boxes.

Katie's mom helped Katie finish writing the names of her classmates. "Your valentines are all done!" Katie's mom said. Katie searched the table for one more red paper heart. In washable black marker Katie wrote: "MOM XO KATIE".