



Occupational Therapy Strategies

Handwriting

Provided by: The Children's Occupational Therapy Service
Telephone: 0151 233 5989



Name:

GRASPING YOUR PENCIL

Traditionally, the tripod grasp was considered to be an optimum hold for mastering pencil control. However, many other types of pencil grasp can also be functional and effective. Younger children should be encouraged to:

- Hold their pencil with a tripod grasp.
- Rest the pencil in the thumb web space of the hand (between index finger and thumb).
- Move their pencil using finger movements (rather than arm movements).

Pencil grips

Pencil grips can really help younger children to develop a mature grip. They also make pencils more comfortable to hold and can therefore assist with managing the pressure put on the page.



Heavy pressure

Putting too much pressure through a pencil when writing can significantly slow a child down and cause discomfort and fatigue. Exerting excessive pressure through the pencil is often caused by not being able to regulate the amount of force going through their limbs. This is known as Proprioception. The following activities can help to develop the awareness of pressure going through a child's upper limbs:

- Support your child to complete daily exercises of putting pressure through the upper limbs e.g. wheelbarrow walks, press-ups (wall chair floor), crawling etc.
- Support the child to warm up hands before writing by pinching, stretching and moulding Theraputty.
- Provide a light up pen and challenge the child to write without turning the light on
- Play MI5. Put carbon paper alternately with plain paper. Ask the child to write a secret message so that it only goes onto 1 other piece underneath, so only 1 other secret agent can read it.
- Practice writing and drawing on tissue paper.

Light pressure

Some children do not put enough pressure through the pen when writing. This can make the writing too light to see and can affect the child's pencil control and letter formation.

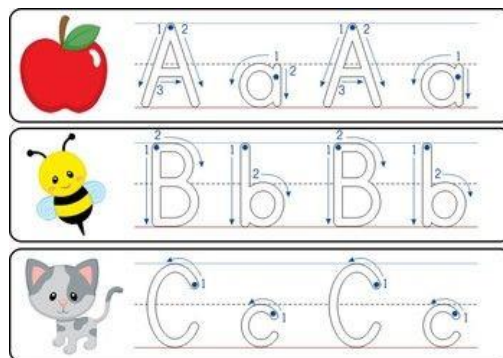
- Trial an angled writing board.
- Weighted wristbands provide additional sensory feedback to the wrist area increasing the child's awareness of their wrist, hand and arm.
- Lower the height of the table the child uses during writing activities. This enables the child to obtain assistance from their body weight to put pressure through the pen/pencil.
- Use softer lead pencil so writing appears darker.
- Support the child to complete daily exercises of putting pressure through the upper limbs e.g. wheelbarrow walks, press-ups (wall chair floor), crawling etc.
- Support the child to warm up hands before writing by pinching, stretching and moulding Theraputty.

PUTTING PENCIL TO PAPER

LETTER FORMATION

Sometimes children are not able to reproduce simple letter shapes and forms even when they are placed directly in front of them. This is often due to a perceptual difficulty. To develop this it is important to use a variety of multi-sensory activities to reinforce the child's appreciation for shape and size.

- Create letters using dough encouraging the child to knead the material into a clear shape (reinforcing tactile sensation).
- Create letters using dough or clay and encourage the child to see if they can detect what the letter is with their eyes closed.
- Encourage the establishment of individual letters before introducing a new one clearly produce a circle before moving onto a square.
- Create letters in shaving foam, sand using the index finger
- Write letters on rough sandpaper using a variety of mediums e.g. soft lead pencils wax crayons.
- Use outlines to reinforce letter shapes, broken line and dot to dots
- Support your child to use a handwriting programme such as Write from the start: Unique Programme to Develop the Fine Motor and Perceptual Skills Necessary for Effective Handwriting



LETTER ORIENTATION

Letter reversal is common in young children. About 50-60% of children from 5-6 may reverse letters and about 10% are still doing this aged 7.

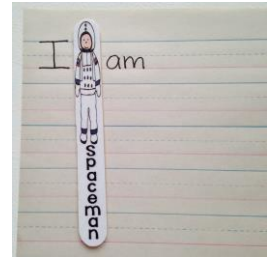
Try the following techniques:

- Write a letter/number on a piece of paper several times and include the correct orientation and the reversal. Ask the child to scan from left to right and cross out the reversed figures. Ask the child to write the correct letter/number under it. Gradually increase the difficulty by adding more letters/numbers.
- Ask the child to draw and cut out large letters and numbers and then arrange them in their correct position and orientation.
 - Use these letters to make words that cause reversals.
 - Repeat this until the child can organise letters, numbers and words several times without mistakes.
- Write a large letter on the child's back and ask the child to say which one it is.
- On index cards, write one word on each card. Miswrite a letter in some of the words. Can they identify the reversed letter?
- Have the child trace the writing with their finger whilst saying it. Then remove the

card and ask the child to write it from memory. Repeat this until the child can write it several times without mistakes.

WORD SPACING

- Encourage the child to leave finger spaces between words.
- Ask the child to place a small sticker between words.
- Use an ice-lolly stick between each word. The child could decorate and individualise the stick to make it more motivating.
- Ask the child to try to read a sentence where there are no spaces to try to help them to understand why spaces are important.
- When a child has completed their work, ask them to read back through it. Put a coloured mark where they could have left more space between words.
- Grid/square paper can be useful for practicing letter/word spacing.



WRITING ALIGNMENT

Some children struggle with organising letters and words on the page.

- Always use lined paper
- Use “Sky Grass Mud” writing sheets. These are available for free off the Internet.
- Use a coloured margin or a coloured marker on the left side of the page to reiterate where writing should begin
- Draw (or print out) pages with different coloured line and encourage the child to write on a different colour each line.
- Use paper which has raised lines. This will provide sensory feedback and help the child to write on the lines. This is available from the www.thedyslexiaishop.co.uk.

DEVELOPING RHYTHM AND SPEED OF MOVEMENT

The muscles in the hand are used to control the pencil and the movement required for handwriting. Dynamic finger movement is required to provide fluid, legible and joined up writing.

- To encourage fluid rather than jerky movements, on a large piece of paper ask your child to trace over different designs.
- A variety of implements can be used such as thick paint brush, crayons, chalks or pencils.
- Tracing without stopping, going backwards or off the line can be practised.
- Ask the child to follow the patterns as illustrated below, encouraging rhythm and speed by tapping the beat. As the child improves increase the speed.

