

**Integrated Community Paediatric Services
Paediatric Occupational Therapy Service**


Worksheet F

Pre-Writing/Early Pencil Skills





Handwriting is one of the most complex skills we have to learn. It involves linguistic, cognitive, perceptual and motor components, all of which have to be integrated. Before children can hold a pencil, they need to be able to sit up and move their arm independently of their body. They need to be able to isolate their fingers to hold their pencil. To write, they first need to visually understand the difference between letters. They need to have success with pre-writing shapes. And, then they need to remember how to form the letters.

<https://www.griffinot.com/motor-skills-for-handwriting/>

The relevant pre-writing activities for the child's area of difficulty should be completed for 5-10mins a day at home/school.

Area of Difficulty	Strategy	Tick when strategy has been tried and add comments.
Child does not show an interest in mark making	<p>Do not force the child to pick up a pencil. Set up an area with an appropriately sized table and chair, and a range of fun and interesting crayons, coloured pencils and paper which they can freely access throughout the day.</p> <p>If and when they do begin to mark make, you can begin copying the marks/scribbles that they are making whilst providing a verbal commentary e.g. "up and down, round and round". You can then slowly and subtly start taking turns and encourage them to copy the marks that you make.</p>	
	<p>Consider other fun ways to explore simple lines and shapes which may align with their areas of interest e.g. using a car to follow along roads, you could even strap a crayon to the front/back of the car so it makes a mark on the paper.</p>	
	<p>Multi-Sensory Play Use various textures to practise drawing horizontal, vertical and circular scribble e.g...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Shaving foam can be smeared onto a mirror/easel or onto a tray. - Drawing with finger or stick in a tray of sand/shaving foam/mixture of cornflour and water. 	
	<p>Refer to 'Reluctant Writer' advice sheet for more ideas</p>	
Child does not have a hand dominance	<p>Do not force the child to use one hand or the other. Observe them carrying out a range of activities and make a note of which hand they tend to choose.</p>	

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	<p>Present objects (e.g. pencils, spoon) in the middle so you don't influence them to just use the hand closest to the object. Observe which hand they choose to use more often.</p>	
	<p>Provide opportunities to practise activities that require a stabilising and dominant hand e.g. unscrewing lids of containers, wind up toys, musical instruments that are held and hit with a beater.</p>	
	<p>Some children show a clear hand dominance but they swap to the other hand when they get tired or they are unsuccessful with their dominant hand. This should be discouraged; they should be encouraged to rest and then try again with their dominant hand.</p>	
<p>Child has difficulties holding a pencil</p>	<p>Refer to https://www.griffinot.com/what-does-good-pencil-grasp-look-like/ and https://www.griffinot.com/supporting-pencil-grasp-development/ (Resource book)</p> <p>Trial the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Short pieces (2-3cm) of chalk/crayon/chunky pencil or finger crayons https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pa1kASdNTW0  <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Provide visual and verbal prompts to remind the child how to position their fingers e.g. 'Crocodile Snap' song by Griffin OT- YouTube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N6kPcQSSsEY  <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Grotto Pencil Grip/ Cross Guard Ultra Pencil Grip https://www.griffinot.com/pencil-grip-reviews/  <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Twist n Write Pencil or PenAgain ('Rocket' pencil/pen) 	

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5. The 'Get a Grip' Kit available from TTS includes all the popular pencil grips which can be trialled with the child.

https://www.tts-group.co.uk/get-a-grip-pencil-grips/1002033.html?gclid=EAlaIQobChMIglq59oOG8wIV1GDmCh123QDaEAAYASAAEqKAa_D_BwE



Provide opportunities to practise hand strengthening, in hand manipulation and pincer grasp activities to help develop the hand skills required to hold a pencil. These ideas should be completed in school finger gym sessions and at home at least 3 times a week. E.g.



Stencil/Texture Rubbings

- Use chalk/crayons on their side to colour in large patterns, to do tree bark/wall rubbings or rub over stencils.
- The child holds the crayon flat on the paper between their index finger, middle finger and thumb (tripod grasp).



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Clothes Pegs

- Squeeze clothes pegs between the thumb and index finger. Wooden pegs are usually easier so you may need to start with these and progress to plastic pegs.
- Use pegs as 'soldiers' and peg them along the edge of a box.
- Make pegs into animals, e.g. a crocodile or shark.
- Write numbers/letters on pegs and peg them on the edge of a box to spell out words or complete maths equations.





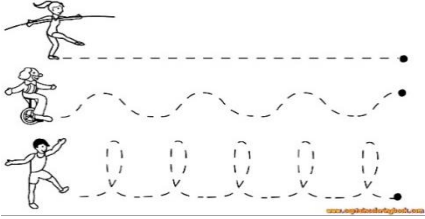
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Play Doh




- Roll the Play Doh into a snake. Pinch the Play Doh between thumb and index finger
- Roll a ball of Play Doh between palms of your hands
- Roll small balls of Play Doh between your thumb and first two fingers
- Find small items hidden inside a large piece of Play Doh.

Dough Disco and other similar YouTube videos could be used


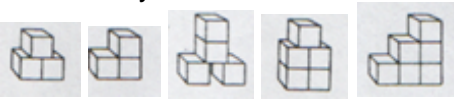

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	<p>Provide opportunities to practise drawing at a vertical surface e.g. paper on the wall, easel, white board. This will help in the development of shoulder stability/control and promote a good wrist posture and pencil grasp.</p>  <p>©Physiotools</p>	
<p>Child has difficulties controlling a pencil</p>	<p>Firstly, check their pencil grasp and consider the above strategies if necessary.</p> <p>Provide opportunities to practice graded pencil control pathways and mazes i.e. starting with wide straight pathways and over time progress to narrow curved pathways with multiple changes in direction.</p>  <p>©Physiotools</p> <p>Then ask the child to draw on the line, rather than between a pathway.</p>  <p>https://www.twinkl.co.uk/resources/literacy-eyfs-early-years/early-years-writing/early-years-fine-motor-skills-pencil-control/4</p> <p>You may need to draw dots at intervals along the pathway/line to keep the child focussed. They could score points for each dot they draw through.</p>	
<p>Child struggles to apply appropriate pencil/pen pressure</p>	<p>Firstly refer to advice regarding 'difficulties holding a pencil' above.</p> <p>Activity ideas and strategies for children that press or grip too hard:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Write or draw with a sharp pencil on a piece of paper placed on the carpet or over a flat piece of play dough or carbon paper. Try not to rip the paper or make an impression on the dough/carbon paper - Use self-propelling pencils that will snap if pressed too hard (avoid this strategy with children that are easily frustrated). - "Light-up pens" press so the light doesn't come on. - Colour in a picture using light grey, medium grey and dark grey. Then discuss how applying different amounts of pressure changes the shade of grey. 	

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Writing/drawing on a whiteboard or laminated piece of paper. Aim to avoid making the pen squeak. - Try using a Kush-N-Flex (spikey) pencil grip which can help the child to grip the pencil less tightly https://www.tts-group.co.uk/kush-n-flex-sensory-pencil-grips-10pk/1004742.html - Provide chunky pens and pencils which will enable a more stable grasp and reduce the effort required - Place Blu-Tack around a pencil approximately 1cm from the drawing tip and avoid making an impression in the Blu-Tac when holding it. - Encourage regular rest/stretch breaks 	
	<p>Activity ideas and strategies for children that don't press hard enough or grip too lightly:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use chalk or crayons on their side to do tree bark/brick wall rubbings or rub over stencils. Child holds the crayon flat on the paper between their index finger, middle finger and thumb (tripod grasp). Encourage the child to apply enough pressure so they reveal the stencil underneath. - "Light up pens"- press so the light comes on - Write or draw with a felt pen or gel pens, or soft lead pencils which allow the child to succeed more easily. - Provide chunky pens and pencils which will enable a more stable grasp - Try weighted pens/pencils during colouring/drawing activities.  <p>https://www.sensorydirect.com/blog/make-weighted-pencil/</p>	
<p>Child has difficulty drawing simple lines and shapes</p>	<p>Children need to be able to recognise shapes before they are able to copy and reproduce them.</p> <p>Creating shapes with objects is easier than drawing them. Try activities such as...</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lolly Sticks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Start with copying simple lines and shapes from an example produced by an adult (rather than a 2D pattern cards). - Pattern card templates can be downloaded from online resources such as Twinkl but are more difficult to copy from than a physical example. - Remember to break the design down into parts. 	

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Verbally discuss the design e.g. 'on top of', 'next to' etc. <p>2. Block/Brick Designs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ask the child to copy simple block designs from a model made by an adult. Some children may need to watch the adult demonstrate building the model.  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Start with just 3 blocks of the same colour. Over time you can introduce more blocks and different colours and make sure that the child copies the colours accurately.  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Talk about the position of the blocks in relation to each other e.g. 'on top of', 'next to', help the child to identify if their attempt is 'the same' or 'different'. - Later, the child can copy block designs from 2D pictures on a card rather than a model. 	
	<p>Multi-Sensory Shape Practise</p> <p>Use various textures to practise drawing:</p> <p style="text-align: center;"> — o+ / □ \ X Δ ∩ U</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Shaving foam can be smeared onto a mirror/easel or onto a tray. - Writing with finger or stick in a tray of sand/shaving foam/mixture of cornflour and water. <p>Provide hand over hand support to help the child 'feel' the movement.</p> <p>Visual cues such as dots may also help create the plan.</p>	
	<p>Progress from tracing over a shape to joining dots.</p> 	
	<p>If a child is struggling with spatial concepts such as 'top' and 'down' it may be helpful to initially work on a vertical surface so top really means top.</p> 