



Occupational Therapy Strategies

Developing Pre-writing Skills

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Scribbling
and drawing

Name:

GRASPING THE PENCIL

A child's thumb, first and middle fingers make up a dynamic tripod used for holding a pencil to write and draw. Here are some quick ideas to promote using this tripod grasp early on and encourage these three fingers to work together.

- Participate in colouring activities using a small broken 1-inch size pieces of crayon to colour. This will help to encourage the child to hold the crayon between the tips of their thumb, index and ring finger, helping to develop the "tripod" pencil grasp and strengthening the required muscles.
- Pick up games using kitchen tongs, plastic tweezers or clothes pegs. Pick up toy bricks, cotton balls, marshmallows, aluminium foil balls, seeds and buttons.
- Play with stamps and inkpads.

These three fingers also need to be strong to control the pencil. Try some of these strengthening activities:

- Squirting water from a water bottle or spray bottle
- Threading beads
- Popping bubble wrap
- Playing with play doh – rolling, making little balls, squashing, pinching and pulling it apart
- Tearing and scrunching paper for craft activities
- Putting coins into a money box
- Pick-up games (as above)
- Board games e.g. Operation, Frustration and Hungry Hippos will help to develop hand strength and coordination.

DEVELOPING UPPER LIMB AND CORE STRENGTH

In order for children to be able to grasp and control a pencil, they need to have good core stability and shoulder and arm strength, as well as finger strength. Try some of the activities below to develop core strength and shoulder strength

Activities and games which include pouring and scooping:

- Watering plants
- Scooping beads and sand between bowls
- Digging
- Fishing games

Stabbing and Spreading:

- Sorting sponges with cocktails sticks
- Spreading icing, buttercream on a cake

Everyday school tasks:

- Moving heavy items such as stacking chairs, moving PE equipment, carrying books, wiping the board, ringing the bell, holding the door open etc.
- Complete activities where you have to reach up e.g. wipe the black board, paint a picture on paper stuck on the wall or put heavy books away on high shelves.

Animal Walks:

- Bear walks: Walking on all fours with legs straight as possible, bottom in the air
- Crab walk: Move from flat on your back, lift arms over head and push against the floor till your body is up in the air and you look like a crab. (Body, head and neck parallel to floor)
- Walrus walk: Lie on stomach on the floor and push body weight onto straight arms, keeping legs straight and on the floor. See if you can move forward 'walking on your hands' with legs dragging behind you.

Games and Exercises

- Rolling over a peanut ball or yoga ball tummy down with arms out in front. Rolling forward until hands touch the ground and walking forward with the hands. This puts pressure through the wrists and develops strength. Activity can be made more challenging by introducing an activity which will raise each hand one at a time e.g. throwing a bean bag, sorting objects, popping plastic packing material
- Wheelbarrow walking: Walk forward on straight arms whilst support given at the lower part of the body—gradually move support down from thigh to knee. Try races and obstacle courses.
- Wall Presses: Stand a short distance away from the wall. Place hands flat at shoulder height on the wall. Lean toward the wall, keeping feet in place. Stop just before your nose touches the wall. Hold for 10 seconds, see how many you can do - try 10 at first and then see if you can do 20!
- Statues: Stand as still as a statue, get a helper to try and move you from your position. Take it in turns and get the statue to move.
- Chair Presses: Whilst seated, putting hands on the side of the chair and pushing to lift you up off the chair. Hold for 5 seconds.

VISUAL PERCEPTION SKILLS

Visual perception is the ability to interpret visual information. Perceptual skills are an important skill in the development of handwriting, as we need to understand letter shapes before we can recreate them. Some of the activities below will help to develop perceptual skills needed for handwriting.

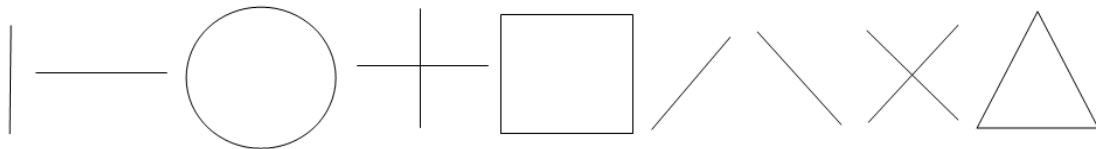
Construction play

- Building bricks, stickle bricks, Duplo, Lego, shape sorter, form boards and jigsaws.
- Design patterns for the child to copy with blocks, pegboard, pipe cleaners, and matchsticks.

- Start with simple designs and move on to more complex patterns.

Drawing activities

- Draw around everyday shapes e.g. jar lids, building blocks, saucers.
- Encourage the child to analyse the design, the number of shapes, edges, corners etc.
- Talk through what you're doing as you draw shapes. Then ask the child to verbalise as they are drawing the same shapes.
- Ask the child questions about the shapes e.g. how this is different to that shape.
- Ask them to tell you an object that is that shape.
- Complete dot to dots, pencil mazes, stencils and tracing, copy lines and shapes such as the pre-writing shapes:



USING A MULTI-SENSORY APPROACH

Practising writing skills does not need to be on pencil and paper. Children who find writing difficult may not enjoy participating in handwriting activities. Work with materials that your child is interested in and enjoys, as the best way to learn is through self-motivated experience. Try to make handwriting more fun by practising in some of the following ways:

- With an index finger, make shapes in the air, sand, using finger paint and shaving foam, in chalk dust or steamed up mirror.
- Draw lines and shapes with a glue pen and add glitter, trace over them with the index finger. You could do this with glitter glue too.
- Trace your index finger over lines and shapes made with textured paper such as sand paper.
- Draw on foil using a toothpick.
- Draw on a chalk board or white board.
- Draw shapes on a 'Magnadoodle' and aqua doodle type toys.
- There are a number of handwriting apps available for tablets and Smartphones. If you have a tablet try searching for handwriting apps and see what you can find.
- Make lines and shapes out of play dough.
- On a large sheet of paper make large circles in an anticlockwise direction, starting at the top, make them smaller and smaller. Tell the child to press harder and softer, draw faster and slower, and press harder and lighter.
- Draw in the air using a scarf.
- Use magic painting books where colour appears when water is added.