

Dudley Children's Occupational Therapy Service
The Sunflower Centre
John Corbett Drive
Stourbridge, DY8 4HZ
Tel: (01384) 366912 or (01384) 361369
Email: bchft.childrensot@nhs.net

Handwriting Activities for School Age Children

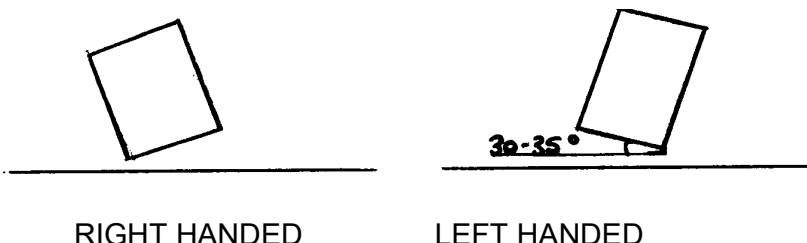
General Seating and Posture Advice

Sitting Position - this is very important for children with handwriting difficulties.

- Children should be sat at a table with their hips, knees and ankles at approximately 90 degrees
- Sit with bottom to back of chair
- Ensure child's feet are flat on the floor. A footrest can be used if necessary or consider smaller furniture.
- Table height should be at the child's elbow height or slightly higher when child is sat down

Position of Paper

- Ensure that children are working with the activity directly in front of them so they can rest their forearms fully on the table. This is particularly important for drawing, writing and scissor skills
- Try angling paper slightly to left if right handed and to right if left handed:



- Some children with visual spatial difficulties or postural difficulties work more effectively at an angled or vertical surface rather than a horizontal table top. Angle boards/writing slopes are available for purchase from a variety of sources



Writing Implements

A variety of writing implements should be tried and the most effective used. Encourage a tripod pencil grasp

- Often a pencil or fibre tip pen is most useful for children with motor problems because they provide a slightly higher resistance than some other pens.
- Chunky barrelled pencils and pens can be easier to grasp
- Writing with a pen can improve the presentation of handwriting. An early pen license may be beneficial for those struggling with handwriting.
- If children are struggling to achieve a tripod grasp, try pencil grips to see which are most effective. Below are a selection of ideas however there are many more available:

Cross guard pencil grip – helps stabilise flexible finger joints, reduces thumb wrapping



Handle pencil grip – provides a physical prompt to keep middle, ring and little finger in palm



Stegosaurus pencil grip – novelty design helps with motivation



Foam pencil grip – provides a physical prompt for finger placement



Claw pencil grip – promotes tripod grasp (different sizes available)



Handiwriter – secures pencil into the web space of the hand whilst encouraging a tripod grasp



Consider pencil and pen alternatives:
Stabilo pencil or pen



Twist 'n' Write wishbone pencil or pen

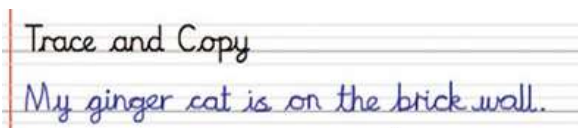


Advice for Letter formations

- Ensure the child has mastered prewriting strokes before moving onto letter formations



- Teach correct letter formations in 'letter families', for example letters which follow similar patterns, i.e. c o a d g q/ r n m h b p.
- Trace correct letter formations – trace the shape with the child's finger initially, ensuring you start and finish the letter in the correct place.
- Imitate (child sees you draw it first) the correct letter formation then copy (child doesn't see you draw it) the correct letter formation.
- Correct the child if they form the letter incorrectly when they are writing. Prompt them to problem solve to see if they can think for themselves how it should be formed.
- Use tram lined paper to help learn correct placement of letters on the line and help control the size



Using vision

- Writing/drawing on aluminium foil
- 'Roll and write' letters
- Complete dot to dot pictures that join up to make the letters

Using touch

- Trace over tactile/different textured letters with finger e.g. sand paper, Velcro letters
- Draw letters with finger in sand, rice, foam, cornflour and water gloop

Using the body and movement

- Draw letters in the air with whole arm (big movement) then fingers (small movement) while verbalising the direction. Use a scarf as an additional visual element.
- Make the letter with string/masking tape/skipping rope on the floor and walk over it afterwards
- Drawing on each other's backs with their fingers and identifying the letters
- Squeeze water from a washing up bottle to form letters – OUTSIDE!

Using smell

- Add a few drops of scented oil to paints to incorporate the use of smell as this can help with memory.

Craft ideas

- Make a letter and let the child trace it, colour it in, cut it out and paste it onto a bright background.
- Make a letter in sandpaper, felt, silk, with pipe cleaners etc. and trace it with their fingers (first with eyes open, then with eyes closed).
- Spread finger paint onto a large sheet of paper or tray and finger paint the letter.
- Cut out a letter, cut it into a couple of pieces to make a puzzle. Get the child to put the letter together again and paste it down onto a bright background.
- Draw on different surfaces e.g. white boards, chalk boards, interactive white board, aqua mats, large pieces of paper, on a wall with a wet paint brush, on the an outside floor using chunky chinks etc. Be creative!
- Let the child make a roll out of clay or play dough and form the letter over a cardboard template. Make the letter out of an edible dough as an alternative and bake it.

Advice to encourage use of finger spaces

- Provide a finger spacer for handwriting activities e.g. decorate a lolly pop stick with their favourite character.
- Use squared paper for writing and colour squares between words to highlight spaces.
- Use an ink pad to fingerprint spaces – using the child's non-writing hand, leave a fingerprint space between each word.
- When copying work, highlight the space between words in a sentence as visual cue for spacing.
- Provide the child with a short paragraph with inconsistent use of finger spacing. Encourage them to circle where spacing has been used correctly with one coloured pen, and incorrectly with another coloured pen.
- Let the child check their own work to determine if there are clear spaces between the words.
- Jump into the spaces of sentences – write a short sentence out using only one word per sheet of paper. Spread the papers out so there is a large space

between each word. Have the child read the word on the sheet then jump over it into the empty space while they say the word “space”.

- Clap the sentence - give the child a simple sentence, such as ‘Brush your teeth.’ Chant it together, encouraging them to clap after every word. Get them to write the sentence, pausing to clap in between each word to reinforce the concept of spaces between words.

Advice to improve handwriting speed and fluency

Fine motor warm up exercises

Bandage grab:

- Use a long thin piece of material such as a bandage (approx. 20cm long). Sit at a table and lay the material out in front of you horizontally
- Put your writing hand on end of the material (right side if right handed, left side if left handed). The palm should be on the table with the fingers resting on the material. Try and gather up the material, tucking it under your hand, using only your thumb and keeping your wrist still.
- Complete 5 times; try to increase your speed each time.

Bandage grab 2:

- Sitting at a table, place the material in front of you, vertically.
- Put your writing hand on the end of the material closest to you to anchor it. Try to gather up the material, using only the fingers of that hand only while keeping the wrist still.
- Complete 5 times; try to increase your speed each time.



Rubber band stretch

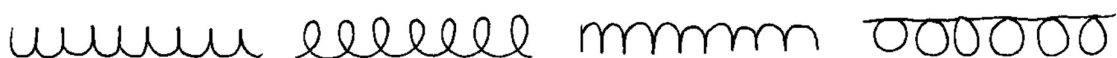
- Place a rubber band around the fingers and thumb. Now slowly stretch the fingers out and then relax them back in. Start with five and then build up to ten. Add extra bands or thicker bands if it is too easy.

Pencil aerobics

- Hold onto the pencil as if you were going to write – using your fingers only, walk up the pencil! And when you get to the end walk back down. Try this 5 times.
- Pick up a pencil from the table and adjust it into the correct position for writing/drawing using only that hand.
- Place your palm facing up with your pencil on it. Roll your pencil from your palm into your fingertips 10 times – using movement of your fingers and wrist only.
- Pick up a pencil with a rubber on the end so you're ready to write. Draw a dot on the paper. Now, using just that hand, turn the pencil round in your hand and rub out the dot. Repeat five times

Handwriting fluency patterns:

- Practice the following patterns as a warm to all handwriting fluency practice:



- Initially the emphasis should be on having your child's hand as relaxed as possible when completing these patterns. Encourage large loose patterns, the focus should be on a relaxed hand rather than precise neat patterns.
- Ideally these should be done on a double sided blackboard on the desk with the child standing up. The child simultaneously draws the patterns on each side at the same time without looking. The child should start at the edge of the blackboard closest to them and move across the blackboard away from their bodies, extending their arms as they go. If you don't have one of these available, try taping a large sheet of paper to each side of an open door. Practice patterns with eyes open and closed
- Practice circular scribbles on a large sheet of paper. Ask the child to close their eyes and try to fill the page with slow circular scribbles. They should try not to stop or lift their pen but keep their hand moving steadily and continuously in a spiral pattern. You may need to tell the child when to stop!
- Put on some music with a discernible beat and encourage the child, first of all to tap along in time to the music. Then have them complete the handwriting patterns in time to the music.
- Once their fluency has developed with the initial handwriting patterns, introduce the following, more complex patterns and repeat the above activities:



Handwriting games

- Eyes shut writing - Make sure each child is set up in a good sitting position, with their preferred pen/pencil and paper. Start by writing with eyes open e.g. name, name of school, short sentence, answer to a question e.g. what did you have for breakfast?
Next, repeat with the eyes shut. This encourages the child to 'feel' the movement and reduces the dependency on vision
- Play the 'Initial Letter Game' with family or friends. Have a list of categories e.g. food, animal, country, name, sport, job, item of clothing. Choose a letter. Everyone must write down a word beginning with that letter for each category. The competition can be timed or untimed. Players swap sheets at the end for marking. 1 point awarded for each correct word. 2 points for a correct word not chosen by anyone else.
- Copy or ask a family member to recite a poem or tongue twister. Try to write it down as quickly and fluently as possible.
- Play 'Just a Minute' with family or friends. To play: give out a sheet of paper to each player. One player thinks of a subject/category. All players then have a minute to write as many words as possible on that subject. All words should be legible and joined up if possible. E.g. "Football": ball, goals, football boots, pitch (etc.).

If the child experiences pain in their hand/wrist on a regular basis when completing extended pieces of writing, alternative methods for recording work such as a computer may need to be trialled. There are a number of typing games available online to help develop typing skills and speed.

Pencil Pressure

Heavy pencil pressure

This may be because the child has poor awareness of finger placement and movement or poor control of the smaller muscles of the hand. Sometimes correcting the pencil grip may help this problem. Some ideas for helping the child that writes **TOO HARD**:

- Have the child practice colouring in shapes / animal outlines light grey, medium grey, dark grey, and black to increase their awareness of different degrees of pressure on the pencil.
- Verbal cues “to write lightly” prior to a writing assignment may be helpful.
- Ghost writing: have the child write a word lightly on the paper and then erase it without leaving any marks. The child wins if they can do this and you cannot read the imprint.
- Use a mechanical pencil as the tips break easily which can raise the awareness of how hard they are pressing down when writing.

Light pencil pressure

This could be due to weakness in the child’s hands or poor finger dexterity. Some children may have decreased sensory awareness.

Some ideas and tips for children that write **TOO SOFTLY**:

- Use carbon paper where the child has to press down harder for it to show through.
- Using a weighted pencil may increase the child’s awareness of the pencil.
- Try rubbing items like leaves or stencils to create a picture.
- Use an ink pen.
- Use a softer pencil as they often write darker e.g. 2B instead of HB.

Handwriting warm up exercises

Children with handwriting problems often experience difficulty with fine finger movements and have poor posture. A short desk based set of hand and arms activities before every handwriting session in the classroom can be helpful. These exercises could also be used as a break during handwriting tasks if a child appears fatigued. Use your own ideas to vary and enhance the list if you like.

Shoulder Shrug

Lift shoulders up to touch your ears. Hold for 3 seconds, and then relax. Repeat this 5 times then switch to pushing your shoulder down and holding for 3 seconds. Repeat 5 times.



Chair Push Ups

Sit on a chair with your feet on the floor and your bottom at the back of the seat. Place your hands on the seat and push down until your bottom lifts up! Repeat.



Push Palms

Place both hands together, palms touching with elbows out to the side and push together. You should feel a nice stretch in your arms.



Pull Hands

Hook fingers together, with elbows out to the side. Pull on hands and hold for 5 seconds. Repeat.



Hug!

Wrap your arms around yourself and give yourself a big hug!



Shake Hands

Shake your hands! First to the front, then to the left, to the right, up above your head and then relax.



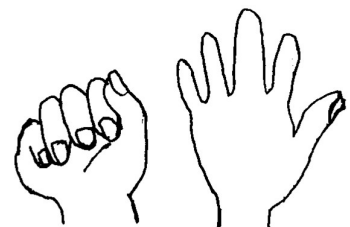
Creepy Crawlies

Place your hands on the desk. Now make your fingers wiggle like creepy crawlies! First to the front, then to the left, to the right, up above your head and then relax.



Shooting Stars

Make fists with both hands and then spread fingers wide like shooting stars. Repeat this 10 times.



Stomp!

Sitting down, stomp your feet and stretch your arms up in the air, prompting the child to lift them as high above their head as possible.

