

Dudley Children's Occupational Therapy Service
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Pre-writing Skills Advice

Before children can learn to write, they need to be able to hold a pencil and develop control in using it to copy the lines and shapes involved in writing. Different media may be used, for example, finger paints, paint brushes, crayons, pencil crayons, chalk, child friendly felt pens used on paper, easels or patio/playground.

Typical Pre-Writing Stages

- Experimenting with making marks during sensory activities, such as messy play, for example poking in mud, drawing lines in sand, using finger paints
- Banging a crayon/pen on paper
- Random scribbles
- Linear scribbles



- Circular scribbles



- Copying strokes/shapes



Strategies to help with developing pencil control

- Find out what stage your child is at then try encouraging them to develop towards the next stage (as above).
- Start with lots of space, for example drawing on large paper before trying to copy smaller strokes and shapes
- Use lots of imitation and demonstration
- Use multisensory approaches for example:

Play with shaving cream: Cover a surface with shaving cream, and have your child use their finger to imitate, copy, trace or draw pre-writing shapes. Try this activity on a

vertical surface to add an extra challenge to this activity. For example, write on a mirror or on a tile wall while in the bathtub.

Play with finger paint: Finger painting can be done on a table, easel, or by taping paper to the wall. Have your child cover the paper with paint and then use their fingers to make marks.

Use sand or rice: Pour a small amount of sand on a table or a plate and have your child make marks with their fingers.

Use a chalk board: Use chalk to create marks or shapes, then use a wet paint brush or a wet finger to trace them and make them disappear. This creates two opportunities to practice.

Chalk on patio/playground: Use chalk to draw on patio/playground

Paint walls/fence/playground: Paint with water on patio/fence etc.

Play with playdough: Use fingers to mould playdough into various shapes. This can be done by copying a shape, either on top of a shape (imitation) or by memory.

Draw outline of shapes: Encourage child to draw between the lines. Use different types of medium such as felts, crayons, paints but also pushing cars, toy figures or balls around the shapes as if it were a road.



Use large paper: Encourage your child to lie on their stomach and draw the shapes as big as they can. They can use the shapes and lines to make a bigger picture, like a collage.

Draw between and around items: Place two small toys at either side of a large sheet of paper and get your child to draw a horizontal line between them. Then move the toys to the top and bottom of the paper so your child can practice a vertical line. To encourage your child to draw a circle, place a plate, cup or any other round item on the paper and ask your child to draw around the object.

Use the whole body: lead the child around the strokes drawn on patio/playground in large chalks or formed with a skipping rope on the ground. If possible have them trace the strokes on an interactive whiteboard using the whole body.

Use music: If the child enjoys nursery rhymes, encourage the child to mimic the action. If they like music, forming prewriting strokes using the whole arm in beat to the music can help with understanding.

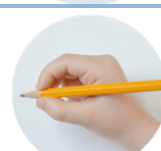
Dot to dots: Have your child join dots that make up the above shapes.

Using a tablet: For children who are interested in using a tablet, encourage them to watch and trace prewriting strokes on a screen using their fingers. Focus on the first strokes listed above as they are listed in developmental order, try to avoid complex

patterns as the child may not be ready. There are a number of apps available for apple and android which can be found via searching 'pre-writing apps' online.

Typical pencil grasp development

To start with children move their whole arm and progress to moving their fingers as they develop increased control. They may hold it away from the point to start with.

<i>First stage</i>	Palmar supinate grasp	
<i>Second stage</i>	Digital pronate grasp	
<i>Third Stage</i>	Static tripod grasp	
<i>Fourth Stage</i>	Static or dynamic/mature tripod grasp	

Hand dominance

This starts developing from 3 years and is expected to be developed by 7 years

Strategies to help with developing pencil grasp

- Encourage developmentally appropriate pencil grasps – see above table for developmental stages.
- Develop a pincer grasp (between thumb and index finger). Use activities to develop this grasp before picking up the pencil. (See fine motor activities section for further advice).
- Use a short pencil to encourage the child to hold it with their fingers at the bottom.
- Use a pencil with a matt finish.
- Try pencils with a chunky barrel.
- Place an elastic band around the pencil shaft to indicate where to place fingers.
- Use of pencil grips.
- Cut a notch in the pencil to remind the child where to position their fingers on the pencil.
- Offer the pencil in a vertical position with the point towards the paper and ask the child to grasp the pencil between the thumb and index finger, then push the top of the pencil back into the web space. If the child reverts to their original grasp, offer another colour and re-establish the desired grasp.