

PRE-WRITING SKILLS

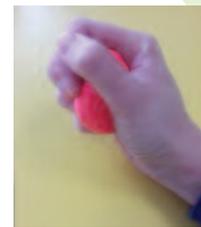
Pre-writing skills are the foundational skills for handwriting. These skills can be developed when drawing, colouring, copying shapes and practising picking up and holding various writing tools including pencils and crayons.

The following strategies are commonly used in Occupational Therapy and are recommended to develop your child's pre-writing skills;

- **WHEN SITTING AT THE TABLE :** Ensure the table and chair are at an appropriate height for your child. Hips and knees at 90 degree angle, feet flat on floor for support, back upright, forearm supported on desk. If feet cannot reach the floor use a foot step or provide a lower chair and table.
- **DEVELOPING SHOULDER, HAND AND WRIST STRENGTH:** Encourage your child to colour, draw and write on a variety of surfaces. Angled surfaces challenge the larger muscles of the shoulder and arm and help with strengthening. Write and draw on a chalkboard/whiteboard fitted to the wall, tape an A3/A4 piece of paper or card to the wall for drawing or colouring, use a free standing painting easel or standing whiteboard/chalkboard.



Theraputty exercises can help to strengthen the hand, wrist and pinch grasp. Theraputty offers resistance when squeezing, pinching or rolling. Theraputty comes in various colours that offer various levels of resistance. Theraputty exercises could be incorporated into a warm up before drawing and writing tasks. Theraputty can be sourced online or in some pharmacies. Soft or soft/medium resistance would be most suitable for small hands. Please refer to the handout entitled fine motor skills for further details on strengthening activities.



- **BOTH HANDS HAVE A JOB:** Encourage your child to use the non-dominant or helper hand to stabilise the paper whilst colouring, drawing, writing with the dominant/doing hand. Remind your child that the 'doing hand' holds the pencil whilst the 'helper hand' holds the paper steady.
- **FORGETTING TO USE THE HELPER HAND:** If your child forgets to use the helper hand you could ask your child to trace the helper hand on card, colour it in and cut it out and use this as a visual prompt/reminder for the child when completing writing or drawing tasks. It would also be beneficial to practise tasks where the child learns the importance of having and using the helper hand. For example holding a stencil steady whilst tracing or holding containers steady whilst opening/closing it with the doing hand. Please refer to the handout entitled Hand Dominance for further details.

- **HOW TO HOLD THE PENCIL:** Efficient pencil grasps include the tripod and quadrupod pencil grasp.

The Tripod Pencil Grasp:

The pencil is held by the thumb and index/pointer finger whilst the pencil rests on the middle finger. The pencil should be positioned in the webspace. The webspace is the space between your thumb and first finger.

A Quadrupod Pencil Grasp:

The pencil is held by the thumb, index and middle finger whilst the pencil rests on the ring finger. The pencil is positioned in the webspace. This is also an efficient grasp. Oftentimes children that present with hypermobility in their finger joints need to adopt a quadrupod grasp for more support.



- **USE A RHYME/STORY TO LEARN ABOUT PENCIL GRASP:** To help your child learn which fingers hold the pencil, make up a rhyme or story with your child. For example if your child is learning how to develop a tripod grasp: Mommy (thumb) and Daddy (index/pointer finger) hold the pencil whilst 'child's name' (middle finger) is hiding underneath.

- **KNOWING WHERE TO POSITION MY FINGERS:** A sticker or elastic band can be positioned 2cm above the pencil tip, to help remind your child where to position their fingers. Encourage your child to use the same grip when holding crayons, drawing, using chalk and when colouring with markers.



- **WHICH TOOLS ARE BEST:** Use shorter crayons or chalk to encourage a more efficient grasp, wider markers can be used on whiteboards, triangular pencils can be trialled until pinch strength develops, short pencils are also useful until strength develops.



The Handwriting Without Tears programme have developed short pencils which can be helpful for use with small fingers and hands.

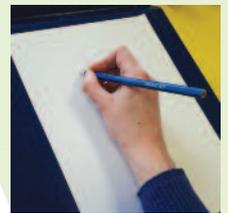
- **WRIST POSITION:** Oftentimes a child may try to draw and write with the wrist in a flexed/hooked or bent position. This can indicate that the writing hand, wrist and upper limb may not yet be strong enough to establish and efficient pencil grasp.

Writing with the wrist in a flexed/bent position can make it difficult for your child to position the pencil in the webspace. Consider writing on angled /slanted surfaces to help position the wrist for writing and drawing tasks whilst strength in the wrist and upper limb is being developed. A slanted handwriting board can be useful. Remind your child to draw from top to bottom and left to right to ensure their wrist is positioned in a neutral position.

✗
Wrist in flexion



✓
Wrist positioned in neutral using a slanted handwriting board



- **PRE-WRITING SHAPES AND LETTER FORMATION:** Help your child to recognise and form basic pre-writing shapes. Colour in, trace over, form in sand, in paint, in shaving foam, use play dough. Repeat these activities when learning letters and numbers. Complete dot to dot patterns to help your child form a diagonal, square, or triangle. Use finger paint, lolli pop sticks, wikki stix, or toys such as Magna Doodle.



- **PENCIL CONTROL:** Trace over horizontal, vertical, diagonal lines, complete drawing trails of various widths, try to stay inside the lines.



- **PRESSURE APPLIED TO THE PAGE:** Explore drawing and writing on various textures including paper, card, carbon paper, tissue paper, sand paper. When coloring remind your child to stay inside the lines. Borders can be highlighted/darkened to help with this.

