

## **Improving Handwriting skills**

### **Improving skills 1: Stability**

Good seating and positioning are critical in providing the stability needed to keep one part of the body still while moving another e.g. writing, tying laces.

- The chair and desk should be the right size.
- Knees should be in line with hips and feet flat on the floor, directly under the knees. If necessary, place a footrest under the feet.
- Elbows should rest comfortably on the desk.
- Working on a slanted surface or writing board can help children sit up straight for longer.
- A variety of different working positions and techniques (e.g., short periods working at the computer, desk, on carpet) may help the child work for longer.
- Allow short breaks to compensate for tiring.

### **Improving skills 2: Hand exercises**

Before, during and after activities, encourage the child to do a variety of exercises to increase awareness of their hands and fingers, stimulate or relax them and restore blood flow, e.g.

- Open/close hands slowly and rapidly
- Shake hands and rub them together
- Tap thumbs to each fingertip in turn

### **Improving skills 3: Strengthening activities for wrists and hands**

Make available some specific items to help strengthen the child's wrists, hands and fingers. Offer them when he/she finishes an activity early or needs a change. They could be: -

- A stress ball or small squashy ball the child can count the seconds before it regains its shape.
- Tearing paper for collages or papier-m.ch..
- Finger puppets.
- Wind up and squeaky squeeze toys.
- Pop-together beads, Lego and Multi-link.
- small items such as macaroni to pick up and put into bowls or small cups.
- Bulldog clips and coloured clothes pegs; the child can clip them onto the side of a box or tin.
- sponges or cloths to wring out.
- Tiddlywinks.
- Hammering pegs.
- Stacking cups, Russian dolls.
- small bits off plasticine/play dough to roll into balls or snakes.
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### **Improving skills 4: Activities to develop perceptual skills & hand-eye co-ordination.**

Children may need help with perceptual concepts. e.g. the ability to place a mark with finger or pencil on a selected point, move from left to right and top to bottom, beginning in the top left corner etc.

Practice large movements involving the whole arms before trying smaller, finer movements and introduce a range of activities, which use a multi-sensory approach as developing sensory awareness will aid development of motor skills:

### **Improving skills 5: Cutting**

Cutting is a higher-level fine motor skill and often popular: Blunt ended metal scissors work best.

Spring-loaded or self-opening scissors position the hand automatically in the thumb-up position and only need squeezing to close. Double-handed scissors enable adult hands to use the scissors behind the child's hands, to guide with the squeeze/release movements. Cutting straws and paper strips are good early cutting activities and card and heavy paper are easier to cut than normal paper.

### **Improving writing skills**

Writing is a highly complex task including many skills in addition to hand-eye co-ordination, and is a result of motor, sensory, perceptual and cognitive processes working together. Multi-sensory, visual and perceptual motor activities will all contribute towards developing handwriting skills.

### **Improving writing skills 1: Pencil grip development**

Initially children hold the pencil in their palm - "palmar grasp". Gradually the fingers extend out and the pencil is held between the thumb and fingers in a rather clumsy grasp but most of the movement comes from the wrist and arm. This is a "static tripod", or "immature tripod" grasp.

Finally children develop a mature grasp holding the pencil between the tips of the thumb and first two fingers, and use small hand movements to control it - the "dynamic tripod grasp".

The ideal finger position is between  $\frac{3}{4}$  - 1 inch from the pencil tip.

They may need additional encouragement and activities to develop the correct grip.

Use pegboards, which encourage the thumb and fingers to pick up in a tripod grasp.

Use short stubs of crayons or chalk that won't fit into the palm.

Use triangular pencils/crayons/thick markers or pencil grips to help cue the child to use a tripod grasp.

### **Improving writing skills 2: Pencil pressure**

Pressure can be affected by position, type of grasp used and type of pencil. Most children use too little pressure resulting in lines that are faint and wobbly and writing that is slow and laboured.

Felt tip markers may help as can a pencil grip to hold the pencil more firmly and also a sloped writing board, or to be less conspicuous, resting on a ring binder or lever arch file.

- Finger painting -use paint, flour, powder, sand, spray foam etc.
- Matching or tracking: connecting two identical pictures or shapes together with a pencil line.
- Touch screen activities.
- Finger rhymes.
- Building and stacking bricks, rings etc.
- Chalking on blackboard.
- Threading beads and lacing activities
- The Lacing Shoe.
- Drawing vertical and horizontal lines beginning on a green dot & ending on red.
- Dot to dot activities, mazes and stencils.
- Making shapes with play dough
- Magna doodle and Magnetic fish games.
- Peg boards, inset puzzles.

### **Improving writing skills 3: Letter formation and writing on lines**

- **Finally remember:**
- all motor skills improve with hard work and practice
- Make letters with play dough. (Initially, make the letter on top of a large printed letter).
- Trace over or draw in between the outlines of large printed letters.

- Squared paper the boxes help with consistency of letter size, writing horizontally and word spacing and can be gradually phased out as skills develop.
- Garden writing -a visual activity using 3 coloured lines, representing the sky, grass and soil to help children understand instructions for positioning and forming letters.
- Cursive (joined-up) writing can improve writing. The child doesn't see each letter as an individual unit but as part of a whole and writing becomes more fluent.