

Handwriting – How can I help my child improve their writing?

Despite advances in technology, the ability to write is still an important life skill. If a child does not have the opportunity of participating in physical activities to develop gross motor skills, they will not develop the fine motor control that enables them to use a pen effectively. In addition, an incorrect grip can also lead to learning difficulties, pain and other problems. The way we hold a pencil or pen may even impact on posture, core strength and muscle tone.

How to Hold Pen/pencil correctly



The “tripod grip” is recommended as the best position for effective and fluent writing. The muscles involved are typically the strongest and take longer to fatigue. This becomes increasingly important as the demand for extended writing increases in secondary school.

A less functional grip may cause slow writing speed, as well as fatigue or pain whilst writing. When a child experiences difficulty with writing and drawing, they may start to lack confidence, feel different to their friends and can become unmotivated.

How to know if your child’s grip is incorrect:

Make sure they don’t grip the pencil too tight. Usually white knuckles, holes in the paper and pencil breakage are a sign of a child who is gripping their pencil/pen too tightly.

Check the first knuckle of their index finger to make sure it is not extended too far or has too much pressure placed on it. It should rest on the top of the pencil/pen.

Make sure they are not making a fist when using a pencil/pen.

How can I help my child develop a correct pencil grip?

Practice, practice, practice – encourage your child to write at least once a day. Your child can practice pencil grip when colouring and drawing, not just when writing.

Let your child choose what they want to write with – chalk, pens or crayons can all be used to practice a good writing grip.

Make sure they sit in a good position – forearms rested comfortably on a suitably sized table, sitting on a chair of a good height and with feet flat on the floor.

What else can I do to support my child with their writing?

Encourage your child to play and be physically active to develop strength and stability in their shoulder girdle and improve gross motor skills. This in turn will help the development of fine motor skills and strengthen muscles in the wrist and fingers. Any activities using hands and fingers such as craft activities, baking, kit-making, sewing, pegging out washing, playing with clay and using scissors, will all help improve fine motor skills.

There are many different pens and grips available which will enable a child to be more comfortable and have greater fluidity/ speed when writing. Encourage your child to try out different styles of pen and grips to find the one that they prefer and that they find of most benefit.

If a child has serious difficulty with their grip and ability to write, particularly if they find the task painful, then it is suggested that you speak to your GP about the possibility of an OT referral for a professional assessment and further advice.