

## Occupational Therapy Service for Children and Young People

### Strategies to Improve Handwriting

This is meant as a general guideline for those children with handwriting problems.

1. Check that the child's feet are flat on the floor and the table is at a comfortable working height (the forearms should be supported on the table).
2. Incorrect pencil grips may be resolved in a variety of ways.
  - a) Investigate different types of pens/pencils. The type of nib or width of writing barrel may affect the grip.
  - b) For those children who place their fingers at different points along the barrel each time the pen is picked up, an elastic band wrapped around the pen will remind them where their fingers should be placed.
  - c) Commercially available pencil grips may help to correct their grip (see your Occupational Therapist for information of these).
3. Check that the paper is positioned correctly. In general, the paper should be on the same side of the body as the handwriting hand.



Also check that the non-dominant hand is anchoring the paper securely. It should move down the page as the wrist moves.

4. It can be confusing for some children to be faced with unlined paper - 4 lines can be useful initially to give clues on sizes of letters and so they can appreciate the difference and relationships of letters.
5. **Poor Spacing of Words**  
Ask the child to separate their words which they have written with a variety of coloured pens to highlight where the spaces *should* be. After this, get the child to re-write using correct spacing.

Give the child exercises using a target sentence and provide blank rectangular boxes into which they can insert appropriate words.

Squared maths paper can be used to give the child a model to work from, i.e. 2 squares to be left blank between words.

6. **Excessive Pressure in Writing**

Try putting several sheets of carbon interleaved with paper and encourage the child to only go through one copy.

Get the child to practice 'hard' and 'soft' strokes so they can identify the difference. An activity suggestion may included drawing 'tornados' starting with lots of pressure and building to reduce pressure so that the child can feel and see the difference between these.



7. In addition, any work on improving general hand-strengthening and finger dexterity will help with writing. Specific programmes can be obtained from either your Occupational Therapist or Physiotherapist.

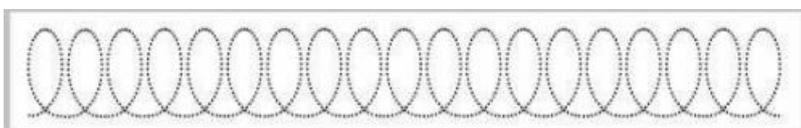
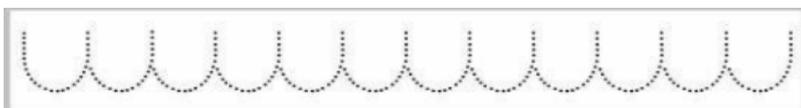
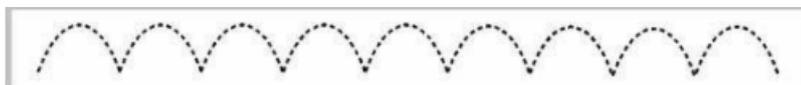
You can help by encouraging games and play which demand hand skills e.g. construction toys, art and craft activities.

8. If the wrist is 'hooked' in writing (more common in left handers) or the hand is held up from the page, a writing slope may be useful.



**Handwriting Patterns**

Handwriting consists of a series of patterns used in a variety of ways. It is important that a child can reproduce these patterns fluently so that cursive writing can be achieved.



Since writing is an activity your child may not particularly enjoy, it is important that the activities are fun and varied.

Short practice periods are better than long hours with paper and pencil (15 minutes **every** day is suggested).

1. Try drawing the pattern using a variety of materials.
  - Draw in a tray of dry and wet sand.
  - Draw in a tray of pasta or rice.
  - Use finger paints.
  - Mix corn flour with a little water, pour onto large plate/tray and draw a pattern in it.
  - Draw with finger in play dough and plasticine.
  - Draw using a knitting needle in play dough/plasticine.
  - Use a blackboard.



2. Encourage your child to make a pattern using a skipping rope, play dough, string etc.
3. Chalk pattern on floor, or place rope on floor and encourage your child to walk along shape.
4. Try tracing over the pattern on the worksheets using the index finger of the writing hand before trying with a pencil. Encourage your child to “talk” their way through the pattern e.g. up, down and around.
5. Encourage the child to verbalise when writing letters i.e. Line down, then up, over and down; for the letter ‘h’.
6. Do patterns in short “word” length pieces.
7. Reinforce clockwise and anti-clockwise movements.