

## CARE & LEARNING SERVICE OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY ADVICE FOR

### PRE-WRITING SKILLS

#### Fine motor skills

Fine motor skills are important for writing as these are used to move a pencil in controlled, precise movements.

It is important to continue to work on fine motor skills whilst develop pre-writing and writing skills.

A separate ***fine motor skills* *handout*** is available.



#### Pre-writing (mark making) and handwriting

Handwriting is one of the most challenging motor skills people do with their hands.

Children who start writing before they are developmentally ready often end up with poor pencil grasps, ineffective letter formations and can often be reluctant to write.

Pre-writing skills are really important in ***building the foundations*** for good handwriting in the future.

Pre-writing activities give the opportunity for children to develop their skills and build a positive association with handwriting.

#### Stages of pre-writing development

- A child scribbles randomly on paper.
- A child scribbles spontaneously in different directions, e.g. straight line, circle.
- A child imitates simple shapes (ones that have one movement)
  - Imitation: when a child watches an adult and then copies the action.
- A child copies simple shapes, e.g. | \ / ○
  - Copying: when a child copies from a piece of paper and does not receive a visual demonstration as to how to make it.
- A child imitates complex shapes (ones that involve multiple movements).
- A child copies complex shapes, e.g. + X △ □
- A child is able to write over and continue patterns.
  - This stage may occur at a pre-writing or writing stage. Patterns give the opportunity for practicing motor movements and working on fluidity.



- A child has an understanding of movement concepts connected with writing, e.g. up, down, around.

## Hand Preference

Hand preference is the regular use of one hand over the other for the skilled part of an activity, e.g. when writing or drawing the **“doing hand”** holds the pencil whilst the **“helping hand”** supports the paper.

A hand preference usually starts to develop between the ages of 2 – 4 years but it is common for children to still swap hands at this stage. A clear hand preference is usually established between the ages of 4 – 6 years.



- If a child does not use one hand as their preferred hand, do not choose for them or force them to use one hand.
  - This has been linked to increased stress levels in young children.
- Observe a child whilst playing or doing activities, e.g. drawing, brushing teeth, eating snack, and see which hand they use more.
- Position toys or activities in front of your child and to the centre so they can choose which hand to use rather than using the hand closest to it.
- If you feel that switching between hands is having an impact on an activity, ask the child, “Which hand is your ‘doing hand’ and which is your ‘helping hand’?”
  - If they are not sure, tell them to try both and ask which works better.
  - If you think a child is switching because their hand is tired, move on to another activity and come back to it later.

## Tips for success

- ✓ Don't feel you have to rush into writing – the better a child's pre-writing skills are, the easier they will find it to learn to write.
- ✓ It's the brain that learns – the brain that learns to write, not the hand. This means that a child can be working on their pre-writing skills **without a pencil** in their hand.
- ✓ Focus on fun – if a child is enjoying an activity they are more likely to learn from it and more likely to do it again.
- ✓ Get moving – not all pre-writing activities have to be done sitting still. Think of which ones can be done outside, in the bath or lying on your tummy.
- ✓ Use vertical surfaces – this helps with shoulder stability, wrist position and helps children to see things easier. Try easels, whiteboard, things stuck to the wall, etc.
- ✓ Posture & seating – if a child is sitting for an activity, think about how they are sitting. A separate **posture & seating handout** is available.
- ✓ **Start big, end small** – start working on pre-writing in big movements, then make the shapes smaller.
- ✓ Use a range of activities – working on pre-writing in different ways helps with learning, improves attention on the activity and makes it more motivating.



## Pre-Writing Activities

In all these activities, try to **include a range of pre-writing shapes and patterns**. Start simple and work up to more complex ones.

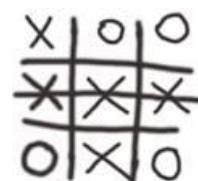
### Thinking Activities (cognitive skills)

- Play 'What am I?' e.g. I have 3 sides and pointy corner, what am I?
- Play problem solving games and do jigsaws.
- Encourage children to talk about things they've drawn or made, discuss things such as the colours, shapes and ideas.
- Play games that involve a child following instructions, e.g. obstacle courses, ball games, Simon Says.
  - Include words often used to teach handwriting, such as: up, down, around, big, small, in front of, next to, behind, left, right, on top of, under the, on the, inside, outside, over the top, straight, backwards, forwards and opposite.



### Looking activities (visual skills)

- Look at pictures/photos/stories – pick out different things in them and play 'I spy'
- Play games that involve looking for patterns, such as noughts and crosses and Connect 4
- Play spot the difference, snap, "odd one out" and matching games
- Use books such as 'Where's Wally?' or 'Seek and Find' ones
- Play Lotto and Bingo type games where your child needs to match up items
- Use construction games where a child can follow photo/picture instructions, e.g. Magformers, Lego, Tap-a-Shape
- Track along mazes and follow-the-path pictures with a finger or stick



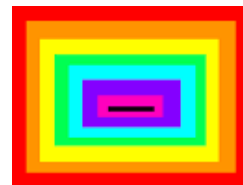
### Doing activities (motor planning & coordination skills)

- Practice shapes in the air, using an arm, finger or wand – try with eyes open and then eyes shut.
  - Start big (using an arm or wand) and then work smaller (using a finger)
- Trace shapes on to each other's backs / hands and play guess the shape
- Floor play activities – make obstacle course and pretend tracks on the floor and go around these with a car / toy or walk around them
- Make shapes out of different materials, e.g. Playdoh, string, tinfoil or wiki stix
- Draw in sand using a finger or stick – at the beach, in a sand tray or using kinetic sand
- Use a short craft stick to make marks in Playdoh
- Draw in shaving foam on a mirror, shower screen or wipe clean table cloth
- Pretend to paint on things with water, e.g. outside walls or a fence
- Use a Magnadoodle or Megasketcher



## Pencil & art activities (pencil control skills)

- Use a range of arts & crafts activities, such as finger paints
- Dot-to-dot activities and mazes
- Rainbow shapes: start with a large shape then draw on the inside of it in different colours, getting smaller and smaller
- Provide a wide range of different pencils, crayons and chalks
- Use different colours and sizes of paper and card
- Vary where a child does an activity: table, easel, blackboard, floor or outside
- Draw around hands and feet
- Trace over different things – greaseproof paper works well for this
- “Down Under” – tape paper to underside of a desk or coffee table
- Write over sandpaper or other bumpy surfaces, such as using chalk on the pavement or corrugated cardboard
- Use novelty pens, e.g. ones that light up with pressure, vibrating pens or ‘water magic’
- Use glass pens (most whiteboard markers also wash off easily) on windows, mirrors or bathroom tiles



## Pencil grip

At the pre-writing stage a child's pencil grip is still emerging – do not try to correct a child's pencil grip at this stage.

- Try using shorter / chunkier / triangular pencils (cut full length pencils in thirds)
- Do lots of activities on a vertical surface
- See the separate fine motor skills handout on ways to develop a tripod grasp



## Resources:

[www.sparklebox.co.uk](http://www.sparklebox.co.uk)

<http://www.teachhandwriting.co.uk/straight-pre-handwriting-patterns.html>

<http://www.kidslearningstation.com>

<http://mamaot.com>

<http://www.learning4kids.net>

## Fine Motor Skills – Mark and Katy Hill (Available from Amazon)

- Activities aim to help develop the full range of pre-writing skills (can be copied)

## Pre-Handwriting Fun Deck (Available from Taskmaster)

- 56 double sided cards, activities can be done directly onto cards with markers