



Supporting Handwriting Skills in Early Years

Handwriting is a complex process of managing written language by coordinating the eyes, arms, hands, pencil grip, letter formation and body posture. The teacher is primarily responsible for handwriting instruction. The therapist role is to determine underlying postural motor, sensory integrative, or perceptual deficits that might interfere with the development of legible handwriting.’(Stephan sans Pratt 1989)

The child’s stages of development and ‘readiness’ for handwriting need to be taken in to consideration. All research tends to agree that children should not be taught handwriting before they are ready as this can result in creating writing difficulties that are hard to reverse. Letter formation requires the integration of visual, motor, sensory, and perceptual systems and it has been concluded that most kindergarten children who are typically developing should be ready for formal handwriting instruction in the latter half of the kindergarten school year.

When a child with handwriting difficulties is referred to the Occupational Therapist, the therapist will assess the level of functioning in the following areas:

Visual Motor Integration (neural function transferring what is seen in to motor expression)

- These visual motor integration activities will help your child to learn to perceive and copy shapes, numbers and letters correctly to help with handwriting skills. Work on large surfaces first. Blackboards, sandpits, outside walls with sidewalk chalk, shaving cream in the shower, even on a mirror with wipe-off pens.
- Find interesting mediums for desktop work before moving onto paper-and-pencil work., try small chalk boards, trays of sand...
- If your child struggles to use a pencil or a crayon, then draw your shape on a board in chalk, or in shaving cream or sand. Your child can then use his/her finger to trace over yours.
- Your child should first get lots of practice tracing the form over and over. Use different colours for a rainbow effect.

Fine Motor Skills (hand dominance, bilateral and motor coordination, in- hand manipulation, functional pencil grip, muscle tone, hand, arm and shoulder strength.)

- Using fun activities will give your child a sense of achievement while helping to develop essential handwriting skills. Kids with poor fine motor skills often dread paper-and-pencil activities. So, let your child improve fine motor skills without forcing the use of a pencil, and you may see some improvement in handwriting ability.
- Money Boxes -Use a regular money box or a recycled container and encourage your child to hold 2 or 3 coins in the hand and push them through one at a time without dropping the others. Upgrade to using more coins as your child gets better



Visual Perception (discrimination between numbers, letters and words that are similar; spacing between letters; placing letters on the writing line and using margins correctly; identifying which letters have been formed completely; letter and number reversal).

- Visual perception activities can help a child to make sense of the information that the eyes are sending to the brain.
- Promote perceptual and motor skills at the preschool level with matching games that require your child to place like items together. Challenge him/her, for example, to go around the room collecting toys and grouping them by genre or category, such as tools, farm animals or wooden toys. Give your child a set of crayons and encourage him/her to write his/her name with the different colours. Or, play a game of picture dominos, which requires children to identify pictures and place them strategically among the other dominos.

Cognition (memory; language comprehension; specific learning difficulties e. g. spellings; problem solving and reasoning).

Possible sensory processing difficulties (that interfere with posture, attention, tactile, visual or proprioception that can influence handwriting).

These may all impact on handwriting so it is important to determine and diagnose the underlying cause of the handwriting problem.

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Would you like for our EIP team to conduct an informative and practical workshop to take you through the details of developmental skills for Handwriting Development and activities to support these at home? If so please email Manjula Gunawardena, head of EIP with your interest before the 5th May.

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If enough interest is generated, we will conduct this workshop.

