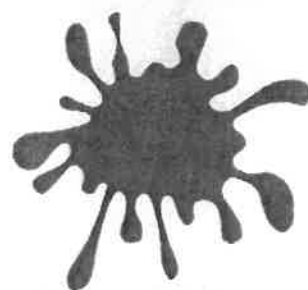
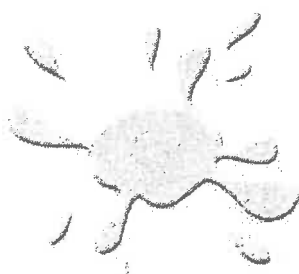
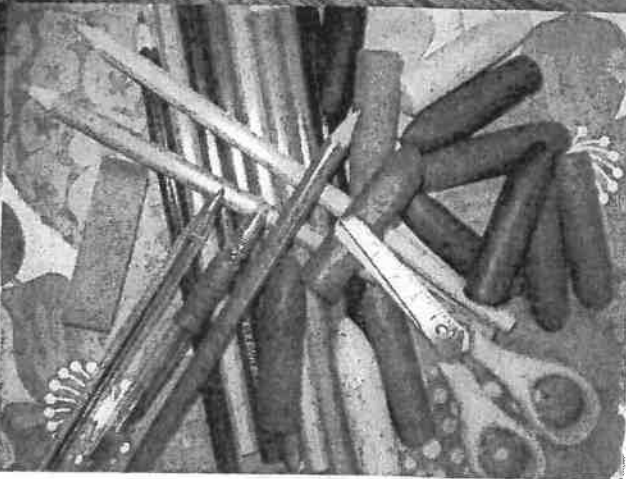
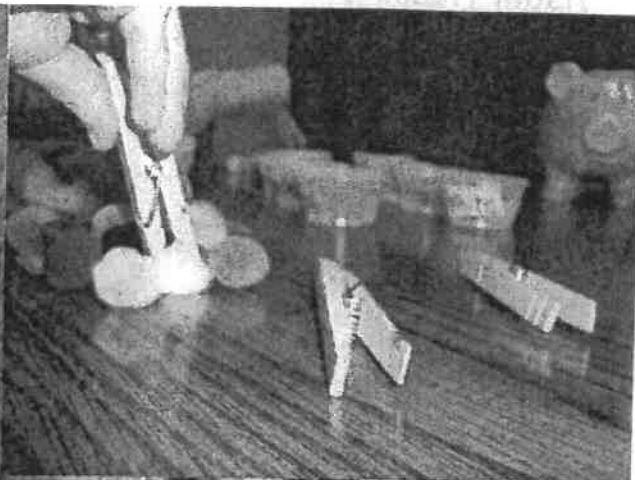
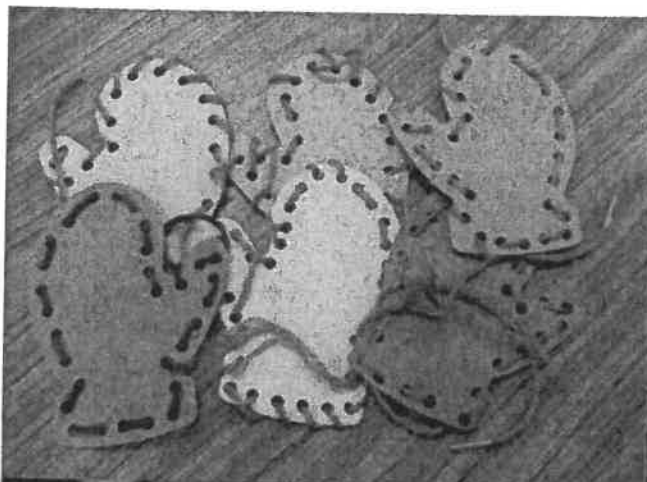


This pack was designed by the children's community occupational therapy team to offer tips and advice to school staff and parents on how to manage children's difficulties at school and at home.

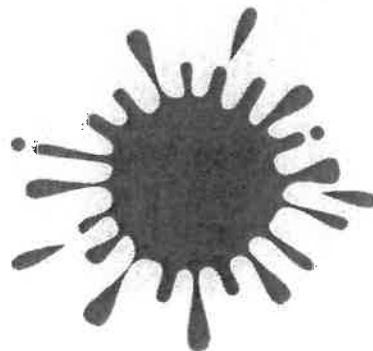
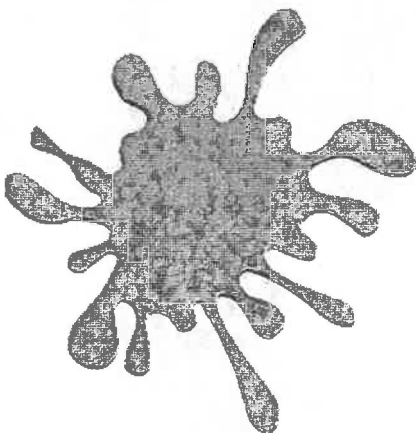
This pack describes the most common functional difficulties identified at school and at home. Its aim is to help identify why the child is having difficulty with a particular activity, and to provide some ideas on how to address these problems.



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Postural Control

Postural control is the strength and stability of your hips, trunk, shoulders and neck muscles. It helps to provide a stable base of support needed to develop balance and refine hand function. Children with poor postural control may slump with a rounded posture when sitting. Poor posture and/or sitting position can have a negative effect on fine motor skills, including handwriting.

Try the following:

- Playing games and activities in different positions to encourage weight bearing. This promotes joint stability and strengthening. Examples include four-point kneeling (on all fours), high kneeling (kneeling with the body upright) or half kneeling (kneeling with one leg in front)
- Crawling activities – for example, through a tunnel or under a bench.
- Wheelbarrow races
- Jumping and hopping games, for example hopscotch or stepping stones
- Climbing frames, swings, slides, and monkey bars (all require appropriate supervision)
- Press ups against the wall or in a four point-kneeling position (make sure that the child's nose goes in front of their hands when bending down – this ensures that they use their shoulder muscles rather than their back)
- Helping to set up for P.E. by moving mats, benches and equipment.
- Carrying books, a box or doing errands for the teacher



Consider the following:

It is important to ensure that a child sits in a good position to allow them to use their hands effectively. When seated a child should sit with their:

- Feet flat on the floor with their bottom right back in the chair
(use a foot rest or block if their feet do not reach the floor)
- Knees and hips at 90 degrees
- Arms resting comfortably on the table with room to move their elbows freely



Gross Motor Co-ordination - Upper limb strength and stability

Gross motor co-ordination is the way a child organises their arms and legs to work together to perform a desired movement. Co-ordination difficulties affect children's ability to perform everyday tasks and can lead to poor self esteem and avoidance of physical activities.

Children with co-ordination difficulties may often be described as clumsy and are more likely to bump into or drop objects. Many skills that require co-ordination also require the child to be able to plan and time their movements, predict what is going to happen if they do something, and react to the situation appropriately.

Co-ordination also refers to fine motor skills, such as handwriting, as well as eye-hand coordination and bimanual (two handed) co-ordination. Please refer to the other sheets in this pack for further information.

Try the following:

- Tummy time – Playing while lying on tummy is a great way to develop shoulder strength and stability. Try reading, colouring, working on puzzles, playing with toys etc, while on the tummy
- Wheelbarrow walking
- Crawl on all fours – forward, backward, sideways or change direction in command
- Animal walks: Child tries to imitate the movements of a crab, frog, duck, bear, or other animal
- Obstacle courses: Encourage the child to sequence and plan several actions, for example go under the table, over the chairs, through the hoop, and so on
- Ask them to throw a bean bag into a bucket or box (this is easier than throwing to another child)
- Ball games: Throw a ball against a wall and clap your hands before catching it again
- Bounce a ball along a line, or into a hoop or a ring.
- Jumping games, such as hopscotch
- Action games, such as 'Simon Says' or 'Follow the Leader'
- Musical statues: The child runs, dances, skips, jumps in time to music and when the music stops, the child freezes in that position



Eye-hand co-ordination

Eye-hand co-ordination refers to the ability to co-ordinate visual information and hand skills for accurate movements. A child with eye-hand co-ordination difficulties will have difficulty coordinating their body movements in relation to what they are seeing.

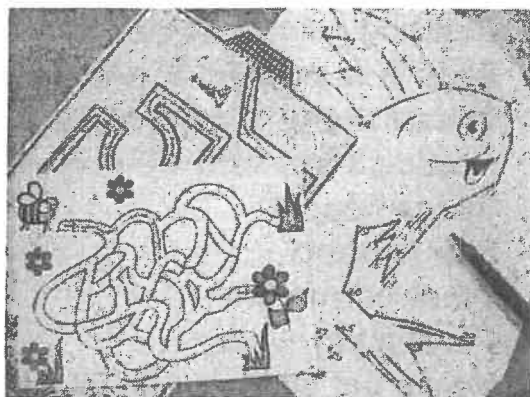
Functional implications

A child who has problems with eye-hand co-ordination will have difficulty with:

- gross motor activities, for example skipping or catching a ball
- dressing activities, including tying shoelaces
- handwriting, particularly copying sentences from the board, spacing words and sizing letters correctly
- craft activities, such as using scissors and colouring inside the lines

Try the following activities:

- Tracing over pictures and along dotted lines
- Copying shapes onto a blackboard
- Dot-to-dots and mazes
- Colouring in detailed pictures and channel drawing (drawing between the lines)
- Stencilling – this helps develop visual regard and control
- Bat and ball games, for example hitting a suspended ball with a stick
- Target games, such as knocking down skittles with a ball or throwing a beanbag into a hoop
- Balloon volleyball – keeping a balloon in the air by batting it back and forth. Pegboard designs

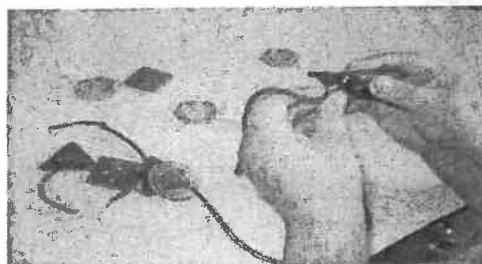
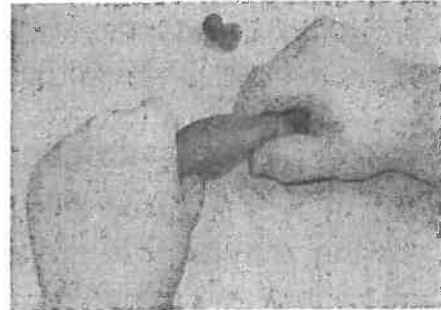


Bilateral co-ordination

Bilateral co-ordination is the ability to use both sides of the body in a co-ordinated way. This is also referred to as bilateral integration. Bilateral co-ordination can be a symmetrical movement, meaning two hands completing the same action in a co-ordinated way (for example, clapping hands together). It can also be a reciprocal or alternating movement, meaning two hands completing different actions in a co-ordinated way (for example, holding paper with one hand and using scissors with the other hand).

Try the following:

- Sand-pit play, using two hands to fill a bucket with sand.
- Pulling Play-Doh apart, pushing objects into it, rolling it with two hands together, making models and shapes.
- Craft activities, including using scissors or ripping and pasting paper.
- Threading large beads, buttons, cotton reels or macaroni onto laces, straws or pipe cleaners.
- Stencilling, holding the stencil steady with one hand while drawing with the other hand.
- Construction toys with plastic or wooden nuts and bolts or interlocking pieces (Lego, for example).
- Pulling magnets apart.
- Ball games: Throwing and catching balls of different sizes, rolling a large ball with two hands, bouncing a ball against a wall or throwing balls at targets.
- Clapping games: Clapping hands with a partner in time to a rhyme.
- Dressing games: Dressing dolls or playing dress up games.
- Pegs in to pegboard, with a pile of pegs on both sides using 2 hands
- 'breast stroke' in swimming
- Holding a tray with a ball on it, and trying to keep it balance
- Space hopper
- Star jumping
- Wheelbarrow walk
- Playing keyboard
- Velcro bat and ball games
- Wrapping up presents



Visual perception

Visual perception refers to the ability to use visual information to make sense of what we see.

Visual perception relates strongly to the guidance of movement, for example walking, writing, using scissors, and completing puzzles. Visual motor integration (VMI) is the co-ordination of visual perceptual skills together with motor skills. It is the ability to integrate visual information and reproduce this as a motor output (for example, copying a picture).

Functional implications:

A child who has problems with visual perception may:

- have difficulty recognising differences in numbers, letters, shapes, words, and objects
- use reversals and inversions when writing letters and numbers
- use capital letters mid-sentence, and have poor or odd punctuation
- often appear inattentive and disorganised
- have difficulty finding objects in a busy environment, for example, a specific pencil in a pencil case

Try the following:

- Ask the child to try to find shapes and forms, such as circles and squares, in a picture (for example, a rectangular door)
- Use hidden picture books, like Where's Wally
- Ask the child to pick out a certain coloured crayon from the crayon box
- Encourage the child to complete activities which involve cutting, colouring, pasting, tearing and matching
- Use jigsaw puzzles and tangrams
- Slowly draw part of a picture until the child can guess what it is
- Draw a design and then ask the child to draw it again from memory
- Play card games, such as snap and pairs
- Play 'I Spy'
- Play spot the difference and ask which picture is the odd one out



Visual tracking

Visual tracking is the ability to quickly and accurately follow a moving object and efficiently move our eyes so we can look at objects from point to point when reading. This smooth, controlled eye movement (ocular motor control) is necessary to effectively complete many of our day to day tasks.

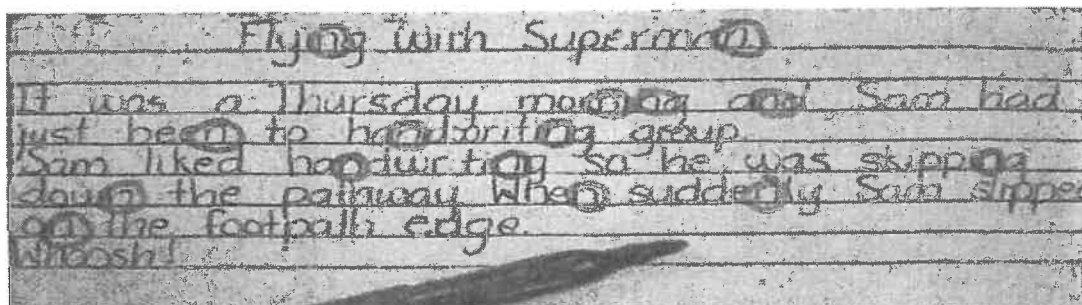
Functional implications:

A child who has problems with visual tracking may:

- move their head when reading
- skip lines and omit words when reading
- lose his or her place in the sentence/paragraph when reading
- have difficulty copying work from the board

Try the following:

- Ask the child to sit down. Have the child quickly shift focus between two objects following your verbal cue. For example, "look at door, look at me, look at floor, look at me", and so on. They should do this using only their eyes, and without moving their head
- Ask the child to point to a corner in a room and then trace the edges with their finger in mid air (along the edge of the ceiling, down the side of the window, around the door frame, and so on)
- On a sheet of paper have a sequence of pictures, numbers, letters. Have the child follow along the line and circle a particular picture, number or letter (see picture below)
- Torch races: You and the child each have a torch. In a dimmed room ask the child to follow your torch movements with their torch, staying just behind your light but never passing your light
- Hold a suspended ball on a string in front of the child with the ball at eye height. Swing the ball in front of the child's eyes encouraging them to follow it from side to side while keeping their head still
- Place a bead on a string tied to something at each end. Ask the child to push the bead along the string with one finger, from one end to the other, without removing their finger from the bead



Fine motor skills

Fine motor skills are when we move the small muscles in our hands to perform precise skilled tasks. The development of fine motor skills does not happen in isolation – it relies on solid sensory and motor foundations, such as good postural control providing a stable base for good hand function.

Pincer grasp:

Pincer grasp is the ability to pick up small objects with the thumb and index finger. It is an important part of the child's fine motor development, and forms part of a tripod grasp necessary for holding a pencil.

Try the following:

- Pinching Play-Doh, plasticine and clay
- Using pick-up sticks
- Getting the child to activate a small wind-up toy
- Picking up small bits of food, for example raisins, chocolate buttons or cereal pieces
- Popping bubble wrap
- Using tweezers to pick up small objects
- Interlocking Construction Toys - Mega blocks are large sized Legos, and Duplo Blocks are also a great way to use the hand to pull them apart



Tip: These types of toys can be used whilst in prone (lying on front/belly) position on the floor, on a therapy/yoga ball, or a wobble board. For example when the child is lying on the therapy/yoga ball the parent/teacher can put together two pieces of the blocks (or build a small tower), and encourage the child to pull apart whilst in lying position on the yoga ball. This will encourage the reaching and pulling movements, in turn will develop arm and shoulder strength, as well as fine motor.

- Unwrapping presents - Parent/teacher to wrap up a present, and this could be a tub or a container of the child's favorite reinforcer, and encourage him or her to unwrap the present as fast as they can
- Water Play - with spray bottles, water pistols and squirt toys.
Sponges: squeezing the sponge to get the water out is great for strengthening hands and forearms

- Pinch strengthening and control
 - Use tongs, tweezers, connected chop sticks to pick up small objects for sorting, such as beads, marbles, beans, pompoms and cotton balls.
 - Spinning tops and spinning toys
 - Windup toys which will encourage the child to use a pincer grasp to wind up the toy to work
 - Board Games, such as Operation, Crocodile Dentist, Bedbugs
 - Stringing beads
 - Dress up dolls: requires a surprising amount of hand strength and endurance
- Clothespin/Peg Games (Following exercises to be carried out using the *thumb and index fingers* only)
 - Use the *thumb and index finger* to open the clothes peg rather than pinching it open against the side of the index finger
 - When pinching open, try and alternate the finger to squeeze opposite the thumb
 - Pick up small objects with the clothes peg: for example, cotton balls, beads, pegs etc
 - Sort out different coloured pegs by putting different colours in large/small containers, as this will require effort and concentration of putting pegs into the large/small hole in the container
 - Attach several clothes pegs along an item of clothing and then pull them off
- Squeeze toys and materials - Foam balls, animals and shapes, Craft activities that require using bottles to squeeze glue, glitter, paint etc.
- Bubble Pack - Pop the bubbles on large or small bubble pack by pinching with thumb and index finger or by pushing down on bubbles when sheet is placed on a hard surface
- Theraputty, Clay and Play-doh
 - Break off small pieces, then try rolling the putty or clay between the pads of the thumb and index finger to make small balls
 - Flatten small balls by pinching them between the pads of the thumb and index finger

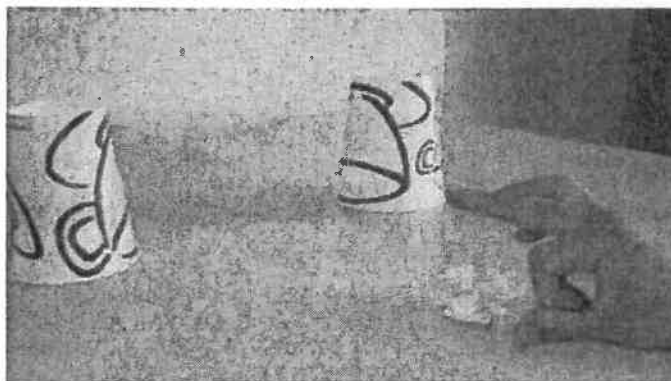
- Try hiding small objects in the putty or clay (for example, beads, pennies, beans), and then try getting the child to pull them out
- Finding objects - Parent/teacher to fill up a tray full of lentils (or any other material/item), and hide the child's favorite sweets/reinforcers amongst the lentils in the tray. Encourage him or her to pick out the reinforcer using their THUMB, INDEX and MIDDLE fingers (pincer grip). This would be a great activity for pinch strengthening and control.

Finger dexterity and in-hand manipulation:

Finger dexterity is the ability to move the fingers and manipulate objects smoothly and accurately. In-hand manipulation is the ability to move an item around in one hand without using the other hand.

Try the following:

- Table football: Tear up small pieces of paper, then have the child roll the paper into a ball using only one hand before flicking the paper into a target – between two cups, for example (see picture).
- Practise tightening and untightening nuts and bolts – start with larger bolts, and then move on to smaller ones.
- Thread beads: Start with one bead at first. Once the child is comfortable threading one bead, ask him/her to try picking up two beads with one hand and then threading them one at a time (keeping the second bead in the hand whilst threading the first one).
- Get the child to flip a coin or a dice over in their hand to look at all the sides, without using the table to help.
- Have the child hold a pencil in one hand with a tripod grip and move the pencil with their fingers so that the hand moves up and down the pencil shaft.



Fine Motor Co-ordination

This is the ability to co-ordinate movements of the eyes and hands to manipulate toys/objects/clothing i.e. dexterity. It may also involve the ability to perform small precise movements quickly and smoothly i.e. with speed, for example doing up/undoing buttons.

Helpful Hints

- Place the child's hand in the required position if your child is unable to copy you
- Talk about the positions of fingers and hands as you are using them
- Use heavy and solid objects/toys to provide weight to help with control – avoid light toys initially
- Work at a level within the child's ability to avoid frustration and ensure success
- Encourage activities requiring in-hand manipulation
- Help stabilise an object while the child completes the task

Activity Ideas:

Craft Activities

- Threading – Make a necklace by threading beads, macaroni etc.
- Wrapping – Wrapping an object with paper, cello-tape and string
- Collages – colouring, cutting, assembling

Games

- Jigsaw Puzzles
- Coin Turn – Rapidly turn over a line of 20 2p coins using finger tips and thumb. Work to increase speed and to using smaller coins
- Spin Coins – Held on edge by the non-dominant hand, with the index or middle finger against the thumb for snapping
- Tweezers – Pick up rice or small objects with tweezers and drop them into a container. Each child can work to break his own record for the number of objects in a give time
- Jenga

Construction Games

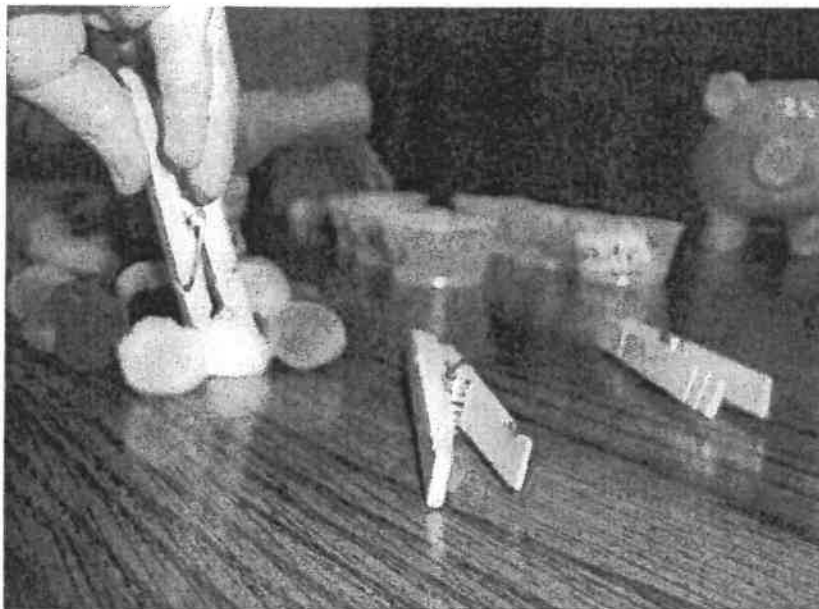
- Building Blocks:
 - Interlocking initially, for example duplo, lego etc
 - Wooden construction blocks heavy & light
- Construction Games – with small pieces, for example lego, knex etc

Pencil and Paper Activities

- Mazes – start with large mazes and gradually move to smaller and more complicated ones
- Tracing – Trace over letters/numbers/shapes around objects, for example kitchen shapes, hands and feet, to encourage the child to use their two hands together

General Activities

- Finger Puppets – puppets on each finger, play puppet games
- Kitchen activities – prepare drinks, make cakes etc
- Action Songs – Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star, Wheels on the Bus, Incy Wincy Spider etc
- Clothes Pegs – Using their thumb and then use other individual fingers to pinch pegs open and place on card, on the washing line etc
- Soap Bubbles – Have the child blow bubbles, then using different fingers to pop them by:
 - Poking
 - Grasping
 - Flipping
 - Hitting them with various body parts. Throwing a bean bag or a small ball at them.







Pre-writing skills



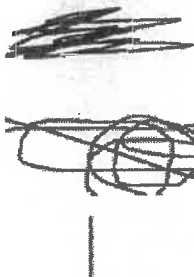


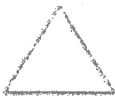
This offers information for parents/carers and teachers about the development of children's pre-writing skills. Pencil grasp and the ability to draw pre-writing shapes are just some of the skills a child needs before they can begin to write.

Pencil grasp: Develops as a child grows up through a specific development sequence. Pencil grasp is important for pencil control and forming pre-writing shapes.

Grasp Development:

| Age | Example | Age | Example |
|---|---|--|---|
| 1 - 1.5 years Palmar Supinate Grasp |  | 3.5 - 4 years Static Tripod Grasp |  |
| 2 - 3 years Digital Pronate Grasp |  | 4.5 - 6 years Dynamic Tripod Grasp |  |

Pre-writing shapes: Children's ability to draw pre-writing shapes follows a developmental sequence.

| Age | Example | Age | Example |
|--|---|--|---|
| 1 - 1.5 years <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mouths pencil • Crinkles paper • Imitated/spontaneous scribble |  | 4 - 4.5 years <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Copies crosses and diagonal lines |  |
| 1.5 - 2 years <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contained scribble • Scribble in vertical/horizontal/circular patterns • Imitates horizontal, vertical lines and circles • Copies vertical lines |  | 4.5 - 5 years <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Copies squares and X's |  |
| 2.5 - 3 years <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Copies horizontal line and circles |  | 5 years 3 months <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Copies triangle |  |

Letter formation

Correct letter formation is important for developing neat and efficient handwriting, and is necessary for joining letters later on. Ensure that children have mastered printed letters before starting to learn cursive (joined up) handwriting.

Things to consider:

- A good sitting position is essential to provide the child with a stable base of support, please refer to the leaflet, 'Postural control' for more details.
- An awkward pencil grip can have a big impact on letter formation.
- When teaching letter formation, consider starting with capital letters.
- Developmentally, children are more able to produce simple shapes and forms such as the vertical and horizontal lines and circles needed for capital letters. It is best to master these before moving onto lower case letters that require more complex shape formation.

Try the following:

- To improve pencil grip, experiment with thicker pencils, pencil grips, or small stubby chinks.
- Fun activities focusing on using tweezers and tongs can help develop the strength and grasp required for accurate pencil control. Please refer to page on 'Fine motor skills' for some more tips.
- Letter formation is best learned using a multisensory approach. Consider using smell, touch, body positions, and verbal cues for letter formation activities. Have fun forming letters using fingers in shaving foam, on chalk boards, water or icing. Have children write letters with fingers on each other's backs and guess the letter.
- Emphasise starting points for letters and the correct direction of lines. Children often look as though they have written the letter correctly, however they may have used segmented line to get to that outcome. You can use green and red dots to prompt a starting and finish point.
- Remember to give clear, simple, consistent verbal directional prompts. Children often find it easier to learn letter shapes in groups, for example letters starting with a c curve such as o, a and d, or line letters such as l, and i.
- Tape a copy of the alphabet to the desk as a visual prompt.
- If you have a tablet or smart phone try a letter formation app such as:
www.itunes.apple.com/gb/app/little-writer-tracing
www.hwtears.com www.nessy.com/hairyletters

Slow handwriting

Handwriting can be slow for many different reasons – poor letter formation, difficulty copying from the blackboard, or hands getting tired when writing. Some children may have hyper-mobile or 'bendy' finger joints. This means they can become tired or their hands may ache when writing large amounts of text.

Try the following:

- First check if letter formation is a problem. If it is, please revisit the 'Letter formation' advice sheet
- Working on fine motor activities can improve hand and finger strength, and this can have an effect on handwriting speed. Please refer to the 'Fine motor skills' advice sheet for more tips
- For children who have difficulty copying from the board or who tire easily when writing, it may be useful to provide handouts to limit the amount of text they have to copy. They can then concentrate on any essential writing
- Explore touch typing as an option. There are many online resources aimed specifically at children that teach touch typing. Remember to monitor the child playing the games, as they may fall into bad habits, such as typing with single fingers. Before the child moves onto the fun game, ensure they complete the practice section
Dance Mat Typing at www.bbc.co.uk/schools/typing
<http://sourceforge.net/projects/tuxtype/files>
- There are many different typing games online and this can be a fun way to teach typing
- The following games are available for free on the internet. Playing lots of different games will keep the child more interested
www.freetypinggames.com
www.rapidtyping.com
www.freeonlinetypinggames.com
www.onlytypinggames.com/games
www.games.funschool.com/game
www.miniclip.com/hangaroo.htm
www.mrkent.com/games/balloonblast/index.asp
www.customtyping.com/goalie_demo.htm

Word spacing

Many children have difficulty with spacing words when writing sentences. This can often make their handwriting difficult to read. Children need room when learning how to write, and worksheets often fail to provide enough space for children to write what is intended.

Although word spacing is a common difficulty, some children who have difficulty with word spacing may have underlying visual perception difficulties.

Try the following:

- Whenever possible, modify worksheets to provide extra space for handwriting
- When modelling writing for the child to copy, start with exaggerated spaces between words to increase his or her awareness of space
- Use a physical prompt such as a dot, sticker or button between words to prompt the child to leave space
- Encourage the child to place a finger in between each word
- Encourage the child to draw a circle in pencil between each word
- Draw a coloured line between words in any sentence that the student has to copy to give him/her a visual cue
- Use tongue depressors or lolly pop sticks to help the child measure spaces
- Try using graph paper or scientist paper in various sizes. Instruct the child to leave one box open as a space between words
- Let the child review their own work to determine if there are adequate spaces between the words
- Some students respond better to concrete instruction such as, "move your pencil over before you start the next word"
- Say the word 'space' after writing each word as a verbal prompt

Starting out with scissors

This information offers tips and advice for parents/carers and teachers whose child is starting to use scissors

Why is it important?

- Cutting relies on the development of many skills, including hand strength and using both hands together
- We learn to cut in the following sequence: cutting straight lines – cutting circles – cutting around corners – cutting complex shapes/curved lines

Things to consider:

- When the child is holding their scissors and cutting materials, the thumbs of both hands should point upwards. You can place a small sticker on the top of their thumbs, providing a visual cue to remind them which way is up
- Make sure they are sitting comfortably with their feet supported
- Remind your child to cut slowly, progressing from large to smaller movements. This can initially be done in an unskilled manner with more tearing than cutting
- Cutting materials such as play-doh or straws is an easier way to learn than cutting paper
- Cutting exercises should always be supervised by an adult

Try the following:

- **Pick up games:** Use kitchen tongs or tweezers to pick up cotton wool or small toys and place them into a container. Start with large objects and progress to smaller objects that require more accurate movement. See how many objects you can move in one minute
- **Happy Hedgehog:** Cut straws and stick them into a ball of play-doh shaped like a hedgehog. You may need to hold the straws to help the child cut them. Encourage the child to push the straws into the play-doh and squeeze the play-doh to make nose and feet
- **Squeeze play:** Practise opening and closing hand action (squeezing) by using play-doh, soft balls, water pistols or water sprat bottles. Allow the child to squeeze using both hands, then one hand, then just between their thumb and two fingers
- **Two-handed activities:** Opening jars, stabilising paper when drawing, pouring, holding a bowl and stirring, using a knife and fork, wind-up toys, lacing/threading

Self-Care Skills

Getting dressed

This offers tips and advice for parents/carers and teachers where the child is learning how to get dressed.

Things to consider:

- Ensure the child is well supported; sitting on a small chair or stool can help, or sitting on the floor with their back against wall
- Start teaching the child to undress, as this is easier than dressing
- Establish a routine, for example pants first, then t-shirt, then socks, and follow this in the same way each time. This helps with learning because it allows the child to predict the steps
- Lay the clothes out in the order they are put on (the same way each time). Think about how the clothes are laid out, for example lay jumpers out with the bottom part nearest to the child and the neck furthest away
- Talk the child through the order in which clothes are put on and taken off. For example, 'Now I am putting your right foot in, now I am putting your left leg in'
- Choose easy clothing for the child to practice with. Larger sizes are usually easier than smaller. Big buttons, wider button holes, and labels or pictures on clothing may help them learn back to front.
- Let the child complete as many of the steps involved in dressing as they can
- Do not rush when practicing. For example, start with getting ready for bed in the evening rather than dressing for school in the morning.
- Reduce distractions – ideally a quiet room with the TV off
- Adapt clothing to help the child cope at school, for example shoes with velcro, velcro on top buttons of shirts, elastic on shirt cuffs, elastic laces, toggles on coats or elastic waistbands
- Encourage the child to use a mirror to check how they look, for example to see if their t-shirt is pulled down at the back. Dressing in front of a mirror helps some children organise themselves while they are getting dressed

Try the following:

'Backward chaining' is a useful method that gives some children a sense of achievement when dressing. The idea is that the child completes the last part of the dressing task, so that they get the reward of completing

the task. As their skills develop they can carry out more and more of the task until they can do it all. For example – socks:

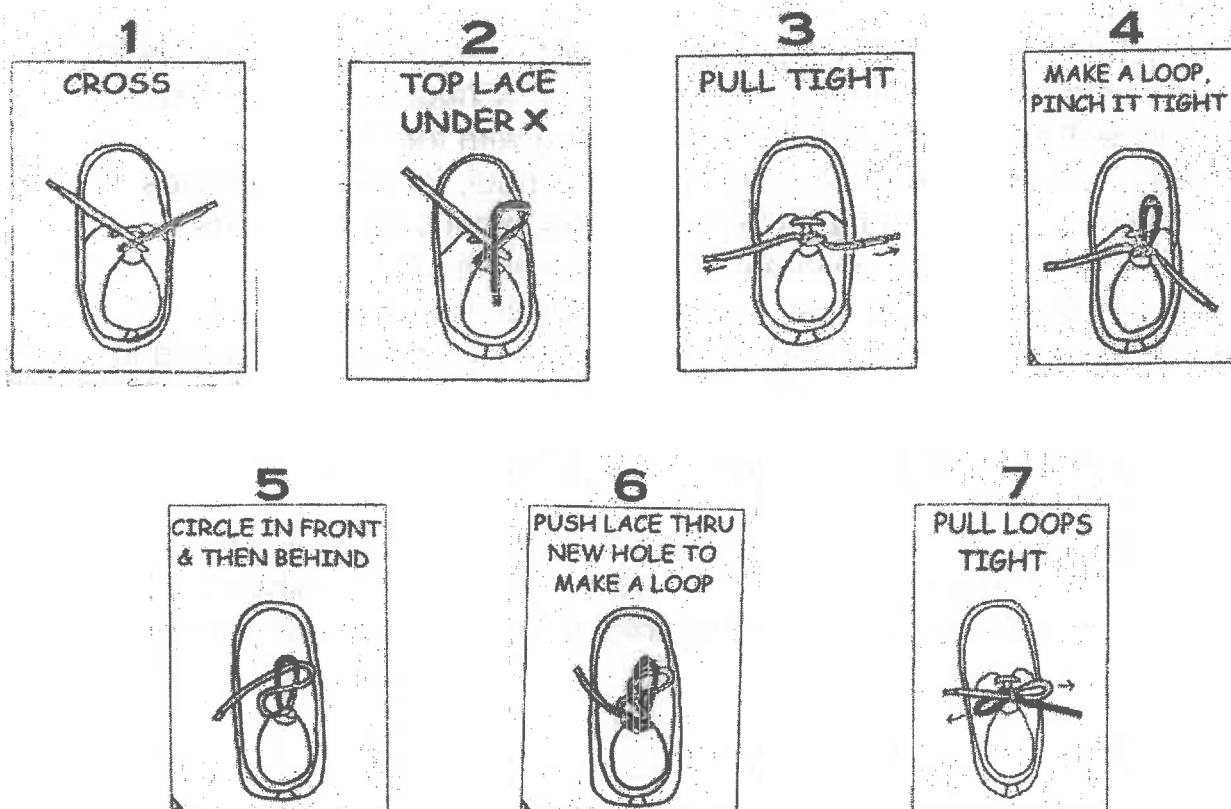
- Place the sock on the child's foot and encourage them to pull the sock up their leg.
- Next they pull the sock over their heel and up their leg
- Then they pull the sock over their foot and heel and up their leg.

Button/Zip fastenings:

- For buttons, allow the child to do up those which they can see (for example, at the bottom of a shirt). Start the task if necessary but then allow the child to finish it (for example pulling the button through).
- Buttons are easier to grasp if they are flat, large, textured or sewn slightly above the surface of the garment. Be sure buttonholes are large enough for buttoning ease.
- A safety pin or a key ring attached to the zip may make it easier to grasp.

Laces:

- Allow time for the child to watch you tie laces. Teach them using the backwards chaining, forwards chaining or breaking it down.
- Toggles are a useful alternative to laces, as are Velcro fastening shoes
- Using different coloured laces can be of help with learning to tie them as they give an added visual cue





Using Cutlery

This information offers tips and advice for parents/carers and teachers where the child is having difficulty using cutlery at mealtimes.

Things to consider:

- A good sitting position at the table is important. The child should be at the right height in relation to the table with their feet supported, for example with a stool under their feet. Check that the plate is in front of the child and is not likely to slip around; a placemat can help with this.
- Have the right tools for the job! A serrated knife is easier for cutting meat and other tough textures, while a non-serrated knife is easier for spreading butter on bread.
- Ensure the cutlery is the correct size for the child. Child-sized or cutlery with wider handles is easier to hold and use. Junior Caring Cutlery (available from online retailers, such as amazon) has shaped handles that promote appropriate hand placement.
- Look at how the child is holding their knife and fork. Their hands should be pointing down towards the plate. To increase the pressure they can apply when cutting, show them how to point their index fingers down the shaft of the knife and fork.
- If the child is right-handed, they should hold their knife in their right hand. If your child is left-handed, allow them to choose which hand to hold their knife in.

Try the following:

- Practice using a knife and fork during a fun activity to avoid frustration. Let your child try to cut play-doh or cookie dough.
- Teach on step at a time; let the child master one step before attempting the next. For example:
 - stab play-doh balls with the fork
 - saw backwards and forwards with the knife
 - use the knife and fork together
- Try guiding the child's movements by placing your hands over theirs while cutting. This allows the child to feel the necessary movements for cutting
- It is easier to practice cutting soft foods, such as fish fingers, egg, boiled potato, well-cooked vegetables. You could slice 'round' food (such as potatoes or sausages) in half to stop them rolling round the plate.

- At mealtimes, start by asking the child to use their knife and fork for just one item, then gradually increase the amount they do as their skill and confidence increases.

Using Cutlery with the Young Child

Sit your child at a table with his/ her feet on the floor or supported. Ask your child to hold the cutlery by resting his / her index fingers along the top of the cutlery. As shown to the right.



Stab the food with the fork & hold the food still. Place the knife in front of the fork and with a sawing action cut the food. As shown to the left.

To get food loaded on to the fork, either stab the cut food or place the

fork near the food and use your knife to squash the food onto the fork.

This is a skill which will require regular practice. Your child may require some reminding about how to carry out the activity. It can take a few months of regular practice to develop a good habit

If meal times are stressful try making it into a game by using play dough instead of food, before introducing the method into meal times.

Hand over hand maybe required for young children when starting to learn this skill.

References:

<http://www.therapiststreetforkids.com/index.html>

<http://www.covkidsot.co.uk/>

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