

Activities to promote pencil skills

Pencil skills

Many children begin to scribble on paper shortly after they can grasp a writing tool - and it's not just paper they will write on if left unsupervised! As children mature, their scribbling evolves into handwriting specific to their culture. Learning to write is a very complex task. It requires:

- the ability to use hand muscles to grasp, and release and control an object
 - the ability to use two hands together
 - co-ordination of eye and hand movement
 - development of perception
 - exposure to sensory and movement experiences.
- All children develop different skills at different rates and this is normal.
 - Only once a child is able to draw the basic prewriting shapes (I — O + / \ X) are they ready to learn how to form letters.

The developmental stages of pre-writing

| | |
|--------------|--------------------------------|
| 10-12 months | scribbles on paper |
| 2 Years | imitates directional scribble |
| 3 Years | Copies: — I O |
| 4-5 Years | Copies: + / \ X |
| 5-6 Years | Copies: name and some letters. |

Pencil grasp development

Pencil grasp is important because as a child progresses through school, they are expected to write to record their work. If they develop a good grasp when they are young this will form a foundation of their writing and recording skills. Pencil grasp follows a predictable pattern. This develops from the basic Palmer Grasp, with movement from the shoulder and arm to move the pencil, to the tripod grasp, where the movement comes from the fingers to move the pencil. (most common grasp).



Basic Palmer Grasp



Digital Finger Grasp



Emerging Tripod Grasp
(movement from arm not fingers)



Tripod Grasp
(using finger movement to move the pencil)

Games for pencil grasp

The following activities develop the muscles and movement pattern required to hold and move a pencil.

- Picking up small objects and placing them into a container eg raisins, peas, rice.
- Threading - beads, macaroni, cut up straws.
- Tweezers to pick up cotton wool balls and small items to transfer between containers.
- Play dough - roll into sausages, pinch with thumb and forefinger, push in objects eg toothpicks. Hide objects in there to find eg beads or marbles.
- Sprinkling glitter on pictures or hundred and thousands on cakes.
- Use water spray bottles - use thumb and first fingers to operate the squeeze spray mechanism. This could be done at both bath time or helping parents/guardians to water plants.
- Activities that involve a strong whole handed grasp help develop muscle strength in the hand and thumb eg swinging from monkey bars, playing tug of war with a towel, holding on while swinging on a swing.

Drawing using sensory play

Drawing doesn't need to involve just pencil and paper. Children learn best through a multi-sensory approach and having the opportunity to explore a

variety of movements and textures. Children start drawing with bigger movements before they are able to make them smaller and more defined.

- Draw shapes in the air with paper towel roll as wand.
- Big drawing on the blackboard.
- Providing resistance and different tactile mediums helps reinforce the movements made.
- Using chalk
- Place paper over sandpaper to draw on.
- Drawing in sand.
- Draw in Angel Delight or whipped cream.
- Add smells to finger paints.
- Attach bells to the end of a pen or brush.
- Using icing to draw on biscuits of cake.
- Squeeze cheese spread on crackers.
- Paint with water on the fence, outside wall or pavement.
- Draw on foil, baking paper, tissue paper, cardboard.



Tips

- Fat crayons are easier to hold for small hands.
- Short crayons - cut crayons in half (1 inch in length) to encourage fingers to grasp.
- Ferby or triangle barrel pencils help position fingers.
- Talk with your child about what they are drawing and encourage them to add extra features.
- Use lots of praise for effort!

Different drawing positions

Encourage drawing on different angled surfaces and in different positions, eg at an easel, kneeling or lying.



For further information please contact our advice email oxl-tr.otadvice@nhs.net

Greenwich Community Health Services
Children's Occupational Therapy
Goldie Leigh
Lodge Hill
Abbey Wood
London
SE2 0AY

T: 020 8836 8621

F: 020 8311 0870

June 2014