

Trafford Children’s Therapy Service

EARLY YEARS – GETTING READY TO WRITE

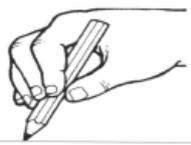
Developing interest and attention for writing / drawing activities

- Use different tactile pre-writing media; sand, finger paints, play dough, shaving foam
- Painting with stubby brushes and large movements and scribbling
- Drawing with crayons (will need to apply more pressure with these). This can be done later but for the present continue to use crayons to give the child the idea of making marks on paper.
- Finger painting. Encourage large movements of the arm.

Developing a functional tripod pencil grip

- The development of a functional pencil grip depends on the stage of hand dominance and hand grasp development. Even when a child has good fine motor skills and well-developed grasp patterns, holding a pencil is a new and complex task. You may need to check the child’s grip on the pencil while they are colouring or drawing. The pictures below show the developmental stages that a child may go through when learning to hold a pen.



			
1-1½ years	2-3 years	3½-4 years	4½-6 years
Palmar Supinate Grasp	Digital Pronate Grasp	Static Tripod Grasp	Dynamic Tripod Grasp

(Erhardt, 1994)

- Use shorter crayons or chalk to encourage a tripod grasp. Sometimes triangular shaped pencils or crayons help.
- There are a wide range of wide barrelled felt tip pens available commercially, many of them with a non-slip grip area for your finger. The handhugger range of pens, crayons and pencils by Berol are usually available in larger WH Smith stores and Early Learning Centres.
- Always make sure that a child is holding a pencil properly before starting drawing.
- It may be easier to start with a board writer/marker pen and do doodles on a large sheet of lining paper.
- Working on a vertical surface helps to develop strength in shoulder and wrist muscles, which are needed for writing. It also allows you to feel the weight of the arm as it moves up and down and across the paper.
- As pencil control develops progress to making circles for flowers and the sun etc.
- Children learn first through imitation. Demonstrate first tracing a maze with your index finger, and then encourage a child to trace a maze with their index finger. Hold a child's finger if necessary while tracing. After tracing with a finger, encourage a child to trace a maze with their crayon.
- Many children would also benefit from doing drawing and writing tasks in a variety of positions. The picture below shows a child lying on their tummy leaning through their elbows and drawing. This improves shoulder strength and stability which is important for handwriting. A child could also benefit from drawing or colouring whilst in a crawling position on hands and knees.
- Children should be able to draw the following shapes which are components of letters of the alphabet before they are ready to start letter formation:



ACTIVITIES TO DEVELOP A TRIPOD GRASP

- Placing clothes pegs/bulldog clips around the edge of a container
- Picking up small objects using tongs and then tweezers
- Threading beads
- Picking up cards

- Fill a medicine dropper (or mini turkey baster) with paint and drop onto paper
- Playing with squirt gun or squirt bottles with a trigger action.

- Drawing on a brick wall with chalk and then using a squirter and water to remove the chalk marks.

- Posting coins into a box with a slot in the lid

- During craft activities, use stickers or mini stampers, holding with the thumb, index and middle fingers only

- Transfer water from one container to another using a turkey baster

- Popping bubble wrap

- Placing pegs in and out of a pegboard

- Making paper clip chains

- Playdough modeling

- Playing with construction toys such as Lego

- Use felt-tips and crayons that are thicker and shorter. Very short crayons cannot be held with a whole hand grasp

- Ask the child to hold a small sponge or eraser in their hand with their little and ring fingers and then hold a pencil with the other fingers

- Use a moulded pencil grip to help the child position their fingers on the pencil, such as The Soft Pencil Grip.