



## PARENT AND TEACHER REFERENCE GUIDE FOR FINE MOTOR SKILLS AND HANDWRITING ISSUES

***Occupation refers to all the tasks or activities that a person either:***

- ***Wants to do (interests, hobbies)***
- ***Has to do (e.g. eat, toilet)***
- ***Is expected to do (reading, writing, academics)***

***Occupational Therapy aims to help a person achieve success in their life occupations.***

### COMMON PARENT / TEACHER CONCERNS

- Attention/ concentration
- Inability to sit still
- Gross motor skills
- Fine motor skills
- Handwriting
- Low muscle tone
- Learning difficulties
- Reading
- Behaviour issues
- Temper
- Obsessive behaviour at times
- School readiness
- General Development concerns
- Sensory Processing Difficulties

COMMONLY CAUSED BY SENSORY PROCESSING, EXECUTIVE FUNCTION AND PROCESSING CHALLENGES

A LITTLE BIT OF EXTRA HELP CAN GO A LONG WAY TO CHANGING A CHILD'S ABILITY TO COPE AND MASTER THE NECESSARY SKILLS



## ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Please note that the following recommendations are necessarily fairly general and give ideas as to what kinds of activities are useful to help develop the child's skills in each area. This will need to be adapted according to each child's personality and home and school context. They are not intended as a recipe book to include each and every ingredient in the child's program.

<b>Fine Motor Skills</b>	
Decreased hand awareness	<p>Increase tactile contrasts between items, objects and tasks. For example, use items or objects that are soft/ hard, fluffy/ coarse, warm/ cool, smooth/ rough, and heavy/ light. Cover pencils with rough textures such as sandpaper or tacky textures.</p> <p>Hiding objects in rice or pasta, which the child needs to get out.</p> <p>Hiding various textured objects in a "feely bag" and the child describes and then guesses what objects are.</p> <p>Rubbing the child's hands with various textures – slimy, soft, rough etc.</p>
Low muscle tone in hands  Decreased In hand manipulation  Inadequate separation of the sides of the hand  Inadequate Arch Development  Decreased Hand strength  Decreased dexterity	<p>Let the child open containers, jars and tubes where possible. These may need to be loosened slightly at first.</p> <p>Pushing or pulling against resistance – e.g. tug-of-war, pushing or pulling heavy objects.</p> <p>Hammering and shovelling activities</p> <p>Popbeads, duplo, lego and interlocking toys</p> <p>Games using dice and counters</p> <p>Stirring and kneading dough for making cookies or bread</p> <p>Play dough and clay activities including putting dough through a garlic press</p> <p>Craft activities using a stapler and hand-held hole punch</p> <p>Tearing and crumpling paper, squeezing sponges</p> <p>Keeping activity items in screw top jars, which the child needs to get out</p> <p>Water pistols with a finger trigger can be used for painting or to squirt balloons or other objects</p> <p>Use of tweezers and tongs to pick up objects</p> <p>Squeezing tubes such as tubes of paint</p>
Decreased eye-hand co-ordination	<p>Dot-to-dots/ mazes</p> <p>Tracing around shapes and templates/ stencils</p> <p>Colouring pictures</p> <p>Tracing over lines in pictures to make outlines</p> <p>Imitating and copying shapes</p> <p>Copying pre-writing patterns such as:   — O + / • \ X Δ</p>



<p>Decreased bilateral co-ordination</p>	<p>Encourage the child to use cutlery properly. Use of a sticker to show where thumbs and fingers should go can be useful. Also, start small with thin, soft items such as cooked carrot sticks and sausages.</p> <p>Let the child open containers, jars and tubes where possible. These may need to be loosened slightly to start.</p> <p>Encourage use of the dominant hand as the “main worker” and the other hand as the “holding buddy” for fine motor tasks.</p> <p>Batting or hitting objects suspended at mid-chest level such as a ball in a net, while holding a bat or stick with two hands at each end (like a canoe paddle).</p> <p>Side sitting and weight bearing on 1 hand, while playing board games requiring reaching across the midline (make sure that the elbow is not locked back and remember to swap sides).</p> <p>Drawing large pictures on a footpath or blackboard with chalk, or on paper attached to a wall.</p> <p>Ball games throwing from different directions so the child needs to cross the body’s midline to catch the ball</p> <p>Encourage crossing midline activities such as brain-gym activities (need to discuss with OT).</p>
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## Fine Motor Skills relating to Handwriting

<p>Delayed pencil control</p>	<p>A program such as “Letterland’s handwriting songs” may be very useful to help learn the letters and their formation (available <a href="http://www.edsource.com.au">www.edsource.com.au</a> or some educational retailers such as K &amp; K).</p> <p>Utilising ruled / lined paper whenever possible will assist the child in developing consistent sizing relating to letter formation</p> <p>Remind the child of the spacing rule and encourage &lt;him/ her&gt;to physically use &lt;his/ her&gt; finger to space words if necessary.</p> <p>Practicing prewriting patterns will assist in developing a more refined control of the pencil for writing tasks.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">O / \ x ◊ + □ △ ↑ ↓ ← →</p> <p>Prewriting shapes can be incorporated into drawings such as ships, trains, cars or fairies.</p>
<p>Poor pencil handling skills</p>	<p>Encourage the use of a variety of writing utensils such as crayons, zooms, pencils, china markers, coloured pencils, glitter glue pens, chalk, paint brushes, thick pencils, thin pencils, triangular pencils and pacers (to provide experience with varied resistances and textures).</p> <p>Encourage the child to put body weight through elbows and forearms while doing activities requiring fine motor movements such as: tracing and colouring in small sections of drawings, drawing small circles around dots, colouring in all “o”s on a page.</p> <p>Progress to activities that require movements of the arm and fine movements of the wrist and fingers simultaneously: mazes, dot-to-dots,</p>



	<p>drawing wavy lines or loopy patterns as part of a drawing.</p> <p>Gradually incorporate into more complex drawing, colouring and cutting activities.</p>
Inefficient pencil grip – with incorrect finger placement	<p>Encourage activities that require a pincer grasp (using thumb, index and middle finger) including the use of small pegs in a peg-board, nailing activities, threading and using tweezers to pick up small objects.</p> <p>Fine motor and finger strengthening activities as outlined above.</p> <p>Use of an appropriate pencil grip (Discuss what is suitable with your OT).</p>
	<p>Encourage short bursts of finger exercises prior to and during writing tasks. This helps to both stimulate / awaken the muscles in the fingers and hand and to assist in moderating the pressure of the grip.</p> <p>Exercises during writing tasks assist in relaxing tight muscles and once again moderates the pressure placed through the fingers. This assists in managing fatigue and discomfort related to writing.</p>
Developing speed and dexterity relating to pencil control	<p>Increase pencil control as described above, which will then lead to increased speed.</p> <p>Practise general finger movement patterns by incorporating them into drawing /craft activities.</p> <p>Utilising programs such as the Callirobics program for drawing to music, which assists in developing a rhythm for writing.</p> <div data-bbox="539 1111 1056 1391" data-label="Image"> <p>Examples of Handwriting Patterns</p> </div>
Unconsolidated skills relating to spacing and sizing of letters	<p>Identify poor spacing / sizing with the child. Work through the rules associated with spacing and return to simple rules such as using finger spaces if needed.</p> <p>Encourage the use of ruled lines whenever possible to ensure consolidation of sizing.</p> <p>Practicing the general finger movement patterns as described to above will also assist in consolidating sizing and spacing.</p>
<p>Unconsolidated skills relating to alphabet knowledge</p> <p>Unconsolidated skills relating to letter formation</p>	<p>Make letters in clay / with pipe cleaners. Trace over them with fingers. Draw them in the air with fingers. Verbalise the direction of the strokes (up / down / around). Draw in various mediums such as sand / fingerpaint / shave foam.</p> <p>Give the child specific instruction on all drawing and writing tasks using a multi-sensory approach including extra touch stimulation, songs and modelling.</p>



	<p>Letters can be taught in groups – such as clock-wise letters/ kangaroo jumpers (b h k m n p r); anti-clockwise letters/ c-code (a c d g o q); anti-clockwise letters/ u-code (u y, v, w); other anti-clockwise letters (e f); line letters (i l t x) and others (z j s). Other groups could include head and body letters (b f h k l t) and head and tail letters (g j p q y).</p> <p>Numbers could be taught in groups according to the way they are formed – left to right (2 3 7); right to left (5 6 8 9 0) and straight lines (1 4).</p> <p>A program such as “Letterland’s handwriting songs” may be very useful to help learn the letters and their formation. (available <a href="http://www.edsource.com.au">www.edsource.com.au</a> or some educational retailers such as K &amp; K).</p>
Struggle to get ideas	<p>Read to the child often with stories that engage &lt;his/ her&gt; imagination.</p> <p>Make up stories together with the child using chant and rhythm while swinging on a swing or hammock. The parent and the child can each take turns to think up a line about what happens next.</p> <p>Encourage the child to talk and then write about &lt;him/ her&gt;self and/ or &lt;his/ her&gt; interests.</p> <p>Encourage use of a model such as: Who? What? When? Where? and Why? Here, parents can fill out the framework first and the child can gradually build the story. Give the child some options to choose from to help &lt;him/ her&gt; get started if needed.</p> <p>the child can verbally tell the story first (may want to tape it) before attempting to write.</p>
Spelling	<p>Improve the child’s visual and auditory memory</p> <p>Facilitate learning in a multi-sensory way using swinging, jumping etc while using letter tiles, magnets and/ or charts.</p> <p>Practice letter recognition.</p> <p>Refer to a speech pathologist if things do not begin to improve</p>
Lack of confidence  Lack of interest	<p>Encourage writing of notes and letters to people to help the child see the relevance of writing. The parent can write the note first, which the child then copies.</p> <p>Get the child to write out fun things such as what &lt;he/ she&gt; wants for afternoon tea. The snack is not served until it is written. Praise for all efforts. Do not criticise or correct the effort in any way.</p> <p>The child can help write the shopping list.</p> <p>Make a book – the child tells a verbal story, which parents can help &lt;him/ her&gt; write down. The child can then draw pictures to illustrate.</p> <p>Praise the child for all efforts.</p>



<b>Postural Control</b>	
<p>Low muscle tone in trunk</p> <p>Low muscle tone in legs</p> <p>Low muscle tone in shoulders and arms</p>	<p>Movement activities such as swinging or rolling over a therapy ball especially linear or back and forth movement stimulate the postural centres of the brain.</p> <p>Trampolining – both the up-and-down movement and the jumping sensation through the legs stimulate muscle tone.</p> <p>Weightbearing activities such as crawling around the yard playing chasies, wheelbarrows, toe-walk crawling, crab walking and other animal walks.</p> <p>Use of a scooter board.</p>
<p>Decreased shoulder and wrist stability</p>	<p>Encourage the child to complete some drawing or written work while standing at a vertical surface, with the paper attached to a wall or slopeboard. Monitor for fatigue.</p> <p>Complete some drawing and writing at a vertical blackboard, using jumbo chalk broken into 2-3 cm chunks.</p> <p>Any drawing with chalk on a chalkboard (flat or vertical) is very useful for developing hand strength and finger dexterity.</p> <p>Weightbearing activities such as crawling around the yard playing chasies, wheelbarrows, toe-walk crawling and crab walking and other animal walks.</p> <p>Activities above eye level: hitting objects suspended overhead, batting balloons, writing on or cleaning whiteboard or blackboard, stamping or printing on a wall mural, collage, hanging objects on high hooks.</p>
<p>Decreased strength in extensor muscles (at back of body)</p>	<p>All the above activities and:</p> <p>Scooter boarding on tummy</p> <p>Swinging on tummy and throwing items at a target</p> <p>Lying on tummy and batting a ball away</p>
<p>Decreased strength in tummy muscles (at front of body)</p>	<p>All the above activities and:</p> <p>Sit-ups</p> <p>Crab-walking</p> <p>Scooter boarding on back</p> <p>Lying on back and batting/ kicking a ball away</p>
<p>Decreased rotation control</p>	<p>Rolling activities</p> <p>Keeping feet still and playing ball games</p> <p>Sitting on a gym ball and playing toss, catch and target games</p> <p>Twister game</p>
<p>Slumped posture</p>	<p>Improve muscle tone and strength as described above.</p> <p>Experiment with the child sitting on a gym ball of the right height for short periods while doing desk-work. Start with 5 minutes and build up</p>



	<p>to 20 minutes. It is OK for the child to bounce on the ball while working (as this builds tone), so long as &lt;he/ she&gt; is able to complete the set work task.</p> <p>Experiment with allowing the child to complete &lt;his/ her&gt; homework in a position of choice such as lying on the floor on &lt;his/ her&gt; tummy, sitting on a tyre, or lying in a hammock (never in front of the TV). Give &lt;him/ her&gt; the choice to have music on or off. (Baroque music is usually best to facilitate concentration).</p> <p>Teach children about posture – Have a cue-card at front of classroom.</p> <p>Ensure the desk and chair are at the right height .</p> <p>A slope board may help as it encourages a more erect posture.</p> <p>Regular stretching breaks from the desk-work tasks are useful</p>
Note:	Horseriding is an excellent activity to improve all of the above factors.

Disclaimer: The suggestions are often useful for children with the issues listed. This list is not exhausted and needs to be customised specifically for your child's needs.

**If your child is resistant to activities and/ or does not show improvements within a few weeks, individual treatment is recommended.**

Please refer to our website: [www.kidsmatters.com.au](http://www.kidsmatters.com.au) for more details.

Please phone [1300 136 596](tel:1300136596) to book an appointment with one of our Occupational Therapists, Speech Pathologist or Psychologist.