

Reading, WRITING, and Arithmetic

Even in these computer driven days, children need to learn to write legibly, as writing will still be used for things as varied as elementary exercises and SAT essays. We've learned recently that the so-called "old-fashioned" method of writing by hand is more than just a way to communicate. Writing by hand is actually a very different sensory experience than typing on a keyboard, with each activating distinctly different parts of the brain. The practice of physical writing helps with learning letters and shapes, can improve idea composition and expression, and may aid fine motor-skill development.

By 3 1/2 to 4 years of age, children start to hold writing utensils with their thumb, index and middle finger, though they might still use arm and wrist movements. By the age of 5, children use more of a tripod grasp on writing utensils, with their thumb and the tips of the first two fingers on the writing instrument, and they use mostly finger movements. A child's writing grasp is usually established by the age of 7.

Children who have fine motor issues - from difficulty holding a writing instrument correctly to an inability to manipulate scissors to lack of ability to draw figures - often find going back to school incredibly frustrating. It's hard to complete a homework assignment when your hand seems "tired" so quickly. A timely evaluation by an OT may be the trick to ensure your child get the greatest benefits from all classroom activities.

HANDWRITING TIP OF THE MONTH:

When children need handwriting support, our pediatric OTs have lots of ways to make writing flow more easily. OT Natalie Katzourin-Buchsbaum offers up this great tip:

Break crayons and chalk into smaller pieces - 1 to 2 inches in size - to help promote and develop a tripod grasp. Children struggling to hold a pencil may find it much easier to use small, thinner "golf" pencils rather than full size implements!



Using broken crayons and small pencils to write at this age can help the small muscles of the hand develop to color, draw and write more efficiently. Using small crayons and pencils forces the child into a tripod grasp, since the child cannot hold them in a fist grasp.

BUT using small crayons and pencils can be fatiguing, so be sure not to do this for long periods of time!

