



Pathways to Success

Helpful Strategies for Parents and Caregivers of Young Children

Activities to Develop and Improve Pencil Grasp

A good pencil grasp allows a child to write comfortably and easily. As a child grows and matures, they change the way they hold a crayon or pencil. During the first stage of development, a child holds a crayon in their palm with their fingers curled around it, or in a fist.

The child then moves to a “painter” grasp; holding the crayon with their fingers. The final stage of development is when the child holds the crayon or pencil between the thumb and first two fingers; called a tripod grasp.

Many factors are involved in developing a good pencil grasp; here are a few activities to help support the child as they work toward developing a tripod grasp.

To help a child learn to hold a pencil between their thumb and fingers, encourage activities such as:

- rolling small pieces of playdough between their fingers to make “eggs”
- hiding small objects like buttons in playdough and then having the child find them
- squeezing, pinching and poking playdough
- playing games with clothespins, e.g. build a fence around a shoebox
- playing with small toys like Lego, pegs, eyedroppers, and stringing beads onto a lace
- posting coins into a piggybank
- drawing or colouring with small pieces of chalk or crayon (smaller sized pieces encourage the child to use an ideal grasp)
- writing on a vertical or slanted surface; this helps develop the wrist position needed for pencil grasp
- playing with a spray bottle or tongs

(see over)



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Use a multi-sensory experience:

- Colour pictures while standing, sitting, lying on the floor or on all fours; this allows the child to strengthen and develop the large muscles of the arm and shoulder and the small muscles of the hand and fingers to develop a good grasp pattern
- Once the child achieves the desired grasp position, place the paper over a textured surface (plastic templates, rough sandpaper, textured objects) and have the child scribble on it. This gives the child sensory feedback and helps them get a feel for the correct positioning.

Show and assist the child placing the pencil or crayon in their hand correctly:

- Use visual or tactile cues, such as stickers, tape, plasticine or a rubber band one inch from the tip, to show the child where to place their fingers
- Use a pencil grip
- Use short crayons, pencils and chalk to encourage a tripod grasp