

Pressure difficulties

Pressure

When learning to write students tend to hold the pencil in a variety of ways. As they mature, they generally develop an effective grip that allows the student to write in a free flowing manner. Some students struggle to establish this free flowing manner, and they can hold the pencil very tight and this can result in the student pressing heavily on the page. Writing over extended periods of time mean the student can report their hand aches, they write less than their peers or even try to avoid writing tasks.

Some useful strategies to reduce pencil grip pressure

- Place a rubber band around the base of the pencil, this will help fingers relax a little as there is a physical prompt where to place fingers and it prevents fingers slipping down further.
- Wrap a thin strip of Blu-tak around a pencil @ 1cm from the tip. If the student holds the pen too tightly they will squash the Blu-Tak.
- Try a thicker or thick triangular pencil –especially with young children
- Try wrapping some plaster tape around the base of the pencil, the tactile feedback is often a comfortable useful prompt.
- Practice holding items – tensing and relaxing – start with very brittle objects such as dry pasta, cereal etc. Repeat with harder objects so students learn to link the language and motor movement eg tense/ relax
- Some older students prefer to write in pencil as the slight vibration when writing helps them maintain a steady grip.
- Some students struggle with the fluency of writing and it may be worth moving them onto gel or fibre tipped pens earlier than their peers. Some students will never achieve the fluency required for a ‘Pen License’- this can affect self -esteem and motivation – consider different success criteria for these students.
- Some students respond well to have a variety of pens to choose from – up to 5 different types of pens. Students are allowed to swap pens during their writing. For some students the change in pressure/ sensation can help relax the hand.
- Place a piece of writing paper on a soft mouse pad /sheet of dycem. If the student writes too hard, the pencil tip will poke through the paper.
- Practice drawing or writing using a mechanical pencil – if you press too hard the lead will break.
- Photocopy three of the same pictures – ask the students to colour in each picture in light grey, medium grey and dark grey- encouraging them to adjust their pressure as they colour. If they struggle to understand the language, have some examples you have done for them to copy.
- Repeat with handwriting simple sentences /names in class etc – ask students to copy with writing that is ‘too light’, ‘too dark’ and ‘just right’.
- Ask the students to complete a simple pattern at the beginning of any written work to warm up the hand. Simple zig zag, dots, swirls etc moving from left to right.
- Magical tracing- give the student a comic or magazine page, ask them to trace over the image while placing on a soft surface, afterwards turn over the magazine page to see if they can see / feel any indentation. Repeat asking students to write words, names etc and see if there is any indentation on the back of the paper.

- Complete fine motor activities using chop sticks, maize sticks etc – if too heavy handed you will not be able to complete the tasks.
- Ask students to write on a sheet of paper not in exercise books as having a firm hard surface just beneath the paper does not allow students to press too hard. If working in a soft exercise book, there will be little resistance and this allows students to press harder.
- Consider using a sloped surface – either a writing slope or an A 4 folder placed on its side.
- Warm up activities before writing – gross motor activities, or use some of the ideas found on the Nimble fingers site http://www.nimblefingers.com/0_min.htm

Hand exercises

- shake, flap and rotate hands
- 10 fingertip presses
- clench fists and release x 10
- walk fingertips along the desk
- walk fingertips up bandage
- finger / thumb routine 12345
- finger rhymes such as Here is the Church, Here is the steeple

Carbon Paper technique

Use carbon Paper sandwich. Obtain five sheets on carbon paper (A5 size is fine) and seven sheets of plain paper. Place one carbon, one plain, one carbon until you use all the paper up – ending up with a plain sheet on top and plain sheet on the bottom. Ask pupil to write on the top and to check after each letter/ mark to see if the bottom sheet has been marked well – if not ask the pupil to press harder. As pupil makes progress increase the number of sheets used. Repeating this task daily for @ 3 weeks is usually very effective at increasing writing pressure.

It may well be worth looking at the additional areas on our Resource section;

- Stamina
- Developing pencil grip
- Finger strengthening
- Strengthening hands and wrists