

Holding a pencil: Advice for parents.



Pencil grip is a developing skill, which usually matures over time from holding in a fist to a tripod grasp. Some children find other ways of holding that whilst less conventional are still functional ie they work for that child. Consideration should be given as to the benefit or not of changing the grip that child has developed.

The most effective pencil grasp is the one shown, which allows the fingers to move without using the wrist, or whole arm. This means that less effort is used and writing can be more fluent. The forearm should be resting on the desk for stability.

Pincer grip

This is the ability to grasp small objects with thumb and forefinger. It is an important part of the child's fine motor development, and necessary for holding and manipulating a pencil. Try the following:

- Encourage the child to pick up small objects (toys, sweets etc.) with their thumb and first finger rather than her whole hand, or thumb and middle finger.
- Encourage the child to form these fingers into a 'beak' and pretend they are a bird picking up seed to encourage and promote the idea of tucking the other fingers away.
- Clothes pegs opened with the thumb and index finger help to strengthen pincer grip e.g. placing pegs on the edge of a plastic tub to make "a cage for an animal".
- Use tweezers to pick up small items such as sorting Hamma beads or the game Operation
- Making play dough into small shapes, pinching a play dough sausage with thumb and first finger and flattening play dough balls into pancakes.
- Pop bubble wrap with index finger and thumb.
- While doing pincer grip activities place a small object (e.g. pencil grip / piece of play dough / a rubber) in the child's palm to be held in place by the middle, index and little finger. This will help with only using thumb and first finger.

Tripod Pencil Grasp

To encourage the development of a tripod pencil grasp try the following:

- Use short (1"), wide pencils/crayons/chalk to encourage the child to hold the pencil correctly.
- Encourage the child to hold the pencil between the thumb pad and index finger pad (like a bird beak). The pencil then rests on the middle finger.
- Put a sticker or band around pencil to show to hold it near the tip.
- Place a grip on the pencil to encourage a dynamic tripod grip (introduce use slowly), or try using a triangular pencil.
- Try using writing implements of different shapes, thickness, lengths, flow. E.g. crayons, felt tips, Etch-a-sketch, chalk, paint
- Name the fingers: Thumb is the "Dad", index finger is the "Mum", remaining fingers are the child, brothers or sisters, friends or pets.(Use driver and passenger names to suit) Say the pencil is the car, just like in a real car, For safe driving Dad and Mum face forward (towards the point of the pencil) Dad shouldn't sit on Mum's lap (thumb on top of index finger) and Mum shouldn't sit on Dad's Lap (index finger on top of thumb) If children use an overlapping or tucked-in thumb, remind them that no one can sit on anyone's lap while driving!