

PENCIL GRASP & PRESSURE

Occupational Therapy

There are many different kinds of pencil grasps that are functional for children to use. The preferred way is to use the “Dynamic Tripod Grip”. The best thing you can do to help your child develop printing skills is to help them develop a good grasp on the pencil, crayon or marker. There are a variety of other ways to hold a pencil that still work well for some children.

PREFERRED POSITION

The Pencil:

The pencil is held between the tips of the thumb and the index finger and is supported against the side of the middle finger.

Web Space:

There should be a nice rounded open “web space” between the thumb and index finger.

Support:

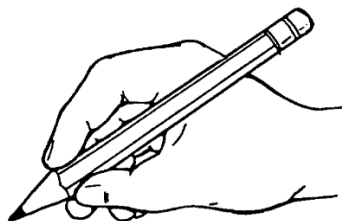
The last two fingers are curved and rested against the table surface.

Wrist:

The wrist is bent back (extended) slightly, and the pencil is held about 1 inch from the tip.

Fingers:

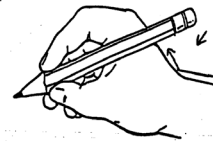
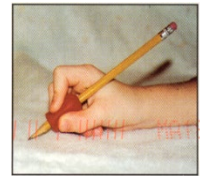
Fingers stay on the painted part of the pencil.



Provide regular, supervised practice periods until the correct grip position is used automatically. If an abnormal grip pattern becomes a habit, it is much more difficult to change later, therefore it is good to encourage an efficient grasp as early as possible.

Helpful hints to promote a good Pencil Grasp

- Wrap masking tape or elastic around the end of the pencil or paint a ring (with liquid paper) to remind the student where to put fingers (about 1" from the tip).
- A variety of pencil grippers are available and may help the child develop a better grip: e.g. triangular pencil gripper, a stetro grip or "The Pencil Grip". Grips are available at most stationary stores and educational stores at a cost between \$1.50 - \$2.50 each.
- Have the student hold a coin ("magic penny") with the ring and baby fingers while holding the pencil. Tucking in these fingers will increase overall hand stability.
- Attach a clothespin to the pencil shaft. Have the student grasp the pencil with the thumb, index and long finger and wrap the last two fingers around the clothespin.
- Tell the child to rest shaft of pencil in the web space (between thumb and index finger). Tell the child that pencils are "lazy" and they prefer to "lie down" rather than stand straight upright.
- Short crayons, pencils, or pieces of chalk encourage use of a tripod grasp.
- The wrist should be held and used in an extended or slightly bent-back position: If the child bends wrist forward (flexed), encourage activities that involve drawing and printing/writing at eye level, on the chalkboard, easel, slant board or taping paper to the wall.
- When the desired grasp position is assumed, place paper over a textured surface (e.g. plastic templates, rough sandpaper, or textured objects such as the bumpy plastic panels used for covering fluorescent lighting fixtures) while child scribbles or makes large drawing movements with crayon, pencil, or marker. This will help the child to get the "feel" of the correct finger positioning.
- Teach a poem for remembering proper pencil grasp:



Lay down the pencil in a soft place,

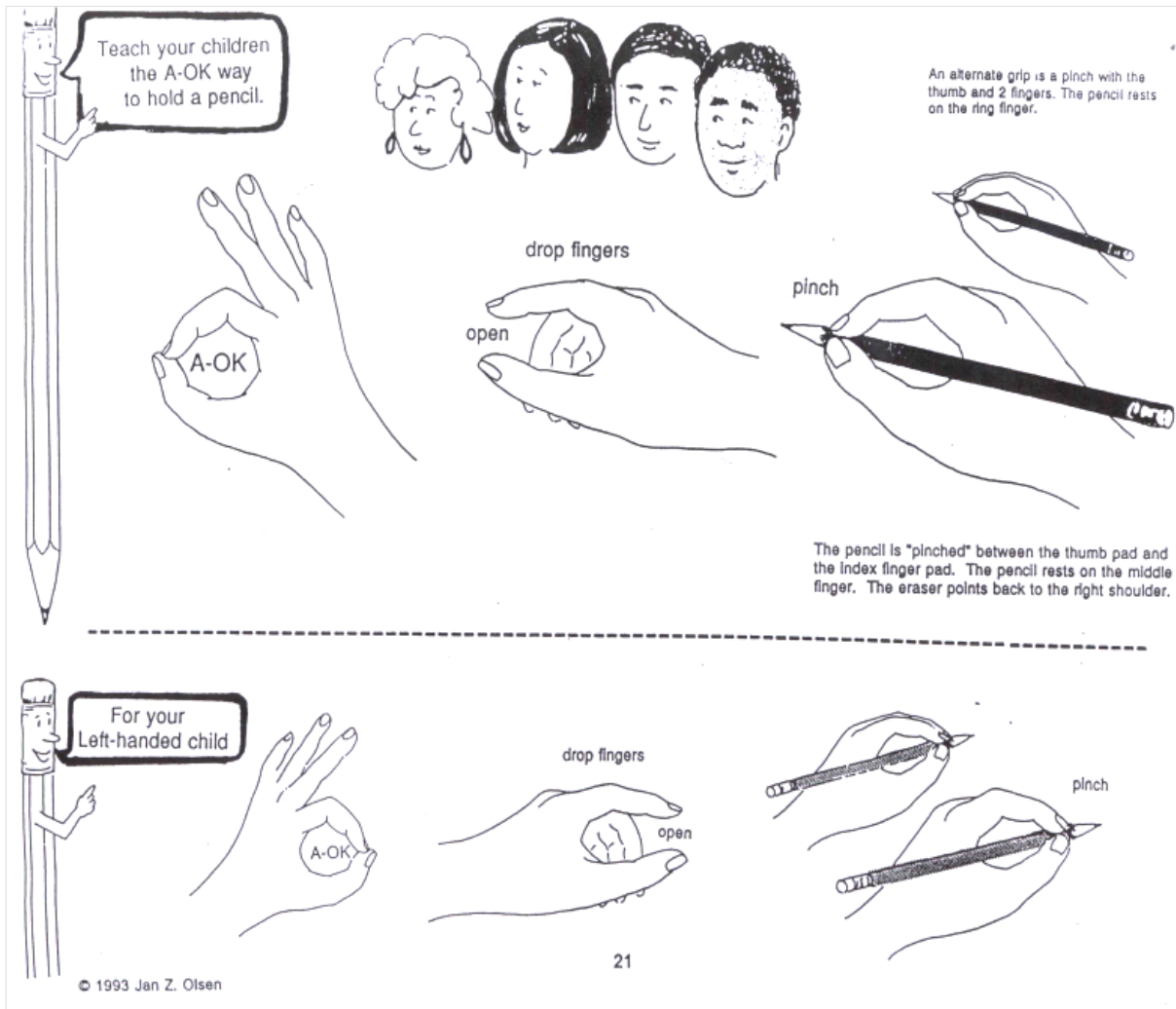
With your thumb and your pointer face to face.

Tall man has the pencil rest on its side,

And all the other fingers go along for the ride!

- Provide your child with a variety of writing utensils. This makes printing practice fun and interesting! Select from many choices: *crayons (scented, glittered, glow in the dark)*, *china markers (also called grease pencils)*, *color pencils*, *felt-tipped markers (regular, overwriter, changeable color)*, *glitter glue pens*, *paint brushes*, *musical pens*, *mechanical pencils*, *vibrating pens*, etc.

Whenever your child demonstrates the correct grasp on their pencil, celebrate!



PENCIL PRESSURE

Tension in the hand or arm often results in excessive force on the pencil. If arm or hand is stiff or tense, work on relaxation activities for a few minutes before beginning this kind of activity. Remind child to relax arm during the activity, if necessary.

Strategies to Try:

- “Mystery Writing” – the student must write something light enough so that when it is erased, it can’t be seen.
- Using a mechanical pencil with a .05 lead. The student must monitor the pressure so the lead doesn’t break. This gives good feedback as to the amount of pressure that should be used during writing.
- If several layers of carbon paper are placed underneath the working sheet, the student should not get more than two copies.
- Put paper on top of corrugated cardboard and try not to make a hole in it when printing or writing.
- Draw a series of lines (8-10) with a pencil going from dark to light – the student should be able to see the difference in pressure of all the lines. Circle the pressure that the student should strive for.
- Write on a Styrofoam tray lined with plasticine clay or try writing on tissue paper without ripping it!
- Encourage your child to experiment with a soft lead pencil until lines are of the desired darkness and width. Cut out the desired line and tape it to the desk as a model for monitoring pressure. Child continues to draw lines, and eventually shapes, letters, or pictures, while maintaining the darkness and line width of the model. When this can be done easily, child practices maintaining the same pressure with eyes closed, visually comparing the product with the model periodically.

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