

Handwriting

Scribbling is the way that young children start to make marks on paper and they gradually learn how to form circles and lines into pictures and then letters once they start school. Writing is a form of communication – it is used in school to demonstrate the knowledge your child has gained and to share stories.

Pencil Control

It is important that your child can hold their pencil securely and control it in order to draw pictures, colour in and form letters and numbers. There are commercially available triangular pencil-grips that help encourage a tripod grip and increase the diameter of the pencil making it easier to maintain grip. Chunky triangular pencils and shaped pens can also be beneficial – let your child experiment to see which ones they prefer.

Letter & Number Formation

It is important that children learn the starting points and direction to form their letters & numbers correctly. There are a number of fun books that encourage children to write the letters starting at the top of the line downwards e.g. l, t, b, h, j and letters that start at the top and go in an anti-clockwise direction to form o, c, a, d, g, and q. Encourage your child to make sure that every letter is completely finished before moving on to the next letter. It is not uncommon for children up to seven years of age to reverse letters and numbers – this should gradually resolve as they get older.

There are many different ways to practise the movements needed for writing. For example, if your child is not keen to practice these in pencil, try with a finger/ stick in sand, cars dipped in paint along a road drawn on paper, whiteboards, chalk on a pavement or water with a paintbrush on outside walls.

Spacing

Encourage your child to use finger spaces (or a cardboard spacer or lolly stick) in-between words so the reader can see where one word ends and the next one starts. Use a highlighter to mark the left margin so your child knows where to start writing on a new line if necessary.

Use of ruler to underline

Try using a ruler with a handle in the middle (e.g. a spine ruler) as this makes it easier for your child to hold the ruler for underlining titles etc. Alternatively, try sticking a piece of non-slip matting or Dycem underneath the ruler to prevent it from slipping.

Alternatives to writing

Some children find it difficult to write and they may benefit from using alternative forms of technology. If your child is going to use a computer or lap-top, they will benefit from completing a child-friendly, age appropriate touch typing course so they learn how to use all of their fingers & thumbs and learn the position of the letters on the keyboard. Voice-activated software helps children to speak the words they want the computer/lap-top to type: they need to have a head-set

and microphone set up at a consistent distance from their mouth for best results. This method is best managed in a quieter environment.

Some children may like to record what they want to write before they forget what they want to say – a small Dictaphone or ‘talking tins’ may be beneficial. Alternatively, encourage your child to try brain storming/mind-mapping ideas before writing: this is an ideal way to jot down single words as prompts for writing. Groups of similar ideas can be put together into paragraphs with an introduction at the beginning and a conclusion at the end – this will help with the structure of their essay.

Word games

Some children do not know what to write and seem to have a mental block when it comes to ideas. Play games with your child to encourage them to describe an animal, fruit, vehicle or object without using the object’s name (and the partner has to guess) – this will help them to become more confident using words appropriately and accurately with their vocabulary. Get them to tell you a story and describe characters and what happens, you can then add to story and then they have to take over again. Help them to look interesting facts up on the computer when they do not know something.

Speed/ recording of work

Children with slower writing speeds can struggle to record information correctly and may need support to fill in homework diaries or a quicker way of recording items to remember. Ways to help include:

- Having printed sheets of whiteboard information/ presentations to annotate at the start of a lesson.
- Taking a screenshot of the whiteboard with their iPad/ mobile phone
- Dictaphone or ‘talking tins’.
- Support to check spellings/ illegible words so that these can be interpreted for marking purposes or for understanding the homework once at home.
- IT use (e.g. school putting homework tasks on a website).

Contact details

Children’s Therapy Services

Telephone number: 0300 019 2936

For further general health-related information, please ask the relevant department for an information prescription or contact:

Patient Experience
University Hospitals Dorset NHS Foundation Trust
Longfleet Road
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BH15 2JB

Telephone: 0300 019 8499

www.uhd.nhs.uk

We can supply this information in other formats, in larger print or have it translated for you. Please call the Patient Experience Team on 0300 019 8499 or email patientexperienceteam@uhd.nhs.uk for advice.

If you wish to make any comments or to ask about any research evidence used to write this leaflet, please contact the Patient Experience Team on 0300 019 8499, write to the Patient Experience Team (address above) or email patientexperienceteam@uhd.nhs.uk

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