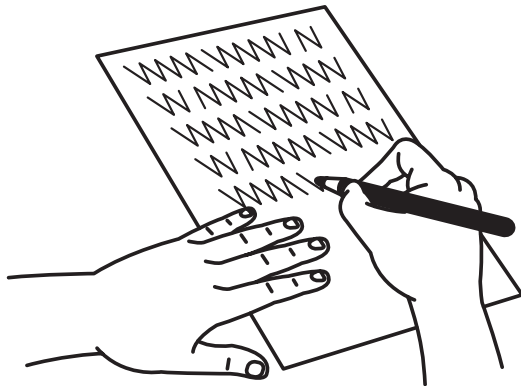


### Definition

The best pencil grip is a comfortable grip that allows the hands and fingers to move freely and easily when writing and drawing. Some children, however, hold their pencil very tightly and often press heavily on the page. As a result, a child may write in a slow and effortful manner or her hand may become tired or sore.

The ideas in this handout have primarily been developed for children in grade 3 and above. This is usually around the time when the amount of written schoolwork increases.



### Helpful strategies

It is important for your child to become aware of how tightly she holds the pencil and how heavily she presses on the page. Then she needs to learn how to monitor her handwriting pressure for herself. Try some of the following ideas to help your child gain awareness of and reduce the amount of pressure she uses.

### To reduce pencil grip pressure

- ▶ Wrap an unused strip of Blu-Tack around a pencil approximately 1cm from the drawing tip. If your child holds the pencil too tightly he will squash the Blu-Tack. Help your child become aware of how tightly he holds the pencil by the marks on the Blu-Tack. Encourage him to hold the pencil less tightly and see if there is a difference to a new piece of Blu-Tack. Practice writing using a “just right” pressure.



- ▶ Help your child understand tension and relaxation by asking him to make a fist, squeeze his muscles as tightly as he can and hold. Then ask him to relax his fingers and thumb. Repeat several times. Then practice holding a pencil in a relaxed way, not in a tight or tense way.
- ▶ Try increasing the width of the pencil shaft as some children find it easier to hold a wider pencil. Try using a pencil grip, tubing or commercially available thicker pencils.
- ▶ Try different pen types such as gel pens or fine liners. Ask your child if it feels easier to write with the new pen and if his hand gets tired or sore.

## To reduce pressure on the page

- ▶ Place a piece of writing paper on a soft mouse pad or woven dishcloth. If your child writes too hard, the pencil tip will poke through the paper.
- ▶ Try using a mechanical pencil and encourage your child not to press too hard or the lead will break.
- ▶ Ask your child to use a grey lead pencil to colour in a picture using light grey, medium grey and dark grey. Then discuss how applying different amounts of pressure changes the shade of grey.



- ▶ Place a handwriting sample on the table that is "too dark", "too light" and "just right". Encourage your child to check her handwriting with the sample.

*too light*  
*too dark*  
*just right*

- ▶ Ask your child to write a sentence "too dark" then "too light" and then "just right". Talk to her about how the writing looks and how her hand feels after each sentence.
- ▶ Ask your child to write her name on a piece of paper that is positioned on a soft surface such as a pad or magazine. Feel the back of the paper – if your child presses too hard it will be easy to feel the writing. Encourage your child to write lighter so that it can not be felt through the paper.
- ▶ Ask your child to write her name with her eyes closed using a "just right" pressure. Talk about how her hand feels when she uses a "just right" pressure.
- ▶ Write on a single sheet of paper when writing at a desk or table. A firm surface helps to limit the amount of pressure your child can use.
- ▶ Encourage your child to listen to the sound of the pencil. If she presses too hard it is louder than if she presses more lightly. Birs and gel pens may make scratching sounds when pressure is too hard.

**Please talk to your occupational therapist if you have any queries about the above information.**