

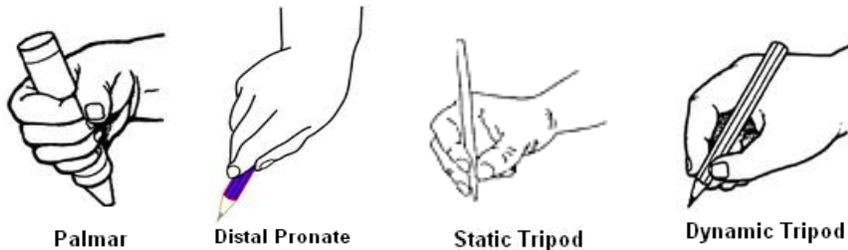
PENCIL GRASP

What is it?

The way in which a child holds a pencil is called “pencil grasp”. It includes the positioning of their fingers on the pencil and the position of the pencil in their hands. A functional grasp permits optimal control, ease of movement and legible written output.

When does it happen?

A child’s hands need to be ready to grasp a pencil with their fingers. Early on, children use their fist and all fingers to hold a printing “tool”. The shoulder, elbow and wrist are involved in moving the tool. Most children develop a mature and efficient pencil grasp between the ages of 4-5. Grasp patterns typically follow a predictable developmental sequence.



This progression is towards an efficient grasp where the tool is moved using coordinated finger movements.

How can I help the child?

An efficient pencil grasp does not happen naturally. It develops through practice and exposure to fine motor activities. Activities that encourage a child to develop an efficient grasp are essential in the early years as grasp can effect legibility, speed, and overall writing success in later years. It’s important to realize that some ‘awkward’ grasps are functional. If the child is comfortable and does not have speed or legibility issues, there is no need to correct the grasp.

Strategies

- Use small stubby tools to promote a more mature grasp:
 - Primary pencils cut down
 - Golf pencils
 - Pieces of chalk
 - Small markers with the cap off
 - Triangular crayons

- Primary sized crayons
 - Pudgy paint brushes
- Teach children their finger names and finger jobs (thumb, pointer and tall man).
- Encourage grasp of the printing tool near the tip, for increased control.
- Wrap masking tape near the end as a visual and tactile cue for finger placement.
- Use a vertical surface to promote proper wrist position, finger placement and use of helper hand:
 - Blackboards
 - Easels (floor and table top)
 - Slantboard
 - Paper, taped to walls, or held up with the 'helper' hand
- Commercially available grips are not often recommended for young children because the emphasis at that age is on hand skill development and teaching of how to hold a pencil.
- If a child continues to have difficulty with holding a pencil as they get older, and it is impacting their written output (legibility or speed), grip use can be explored at that time.

Activities

Suggested activities to develop finger muscles and open web space:

- Lite-Brite and other small peg activities
- Finger games e.g. itsy bitsy spider
- Rolling, squeezing, poking play dough or clay
- Beading
- Lacing
- Squeeze clothespins along the edge of a container, on a string
- Marbles
- Stickers
- Spinning tops
- Stampers

- Use tweezers or tongs to pick up small beads or toys
- Wind up toys
- Place pennies into piggy bank or slot in a container, using thumb and index finger
- Find hidden objects in playdough (beads, pennies, marbles)
- Tear up paper for pasting or collage activities