

# Pencil Grip Development – A Guide

How a child holds a pencil is very important when it comes to letter formation and learning to write, as a functional pencil grip will lead to efficient, pain-free handwriting.

The development of a child's pencil grip, however, is a gradual process that will develop as the child grows.

## Palmar Suplinate Grip – also referred to as the 'Fisted Grip'

- The pencil is held in the palm with a whole fist and all of the fingers and thumb are used
- The movement comes from the child's shoulder
- The elbow, wrists and fingers stay in a fixed position
- Light scribbles are produced with this grip
- Children may prefer to use more vertical surfaces to mark-make on
- It is commonly seen in pre-toddlers, when they first start experimenting with drawing and painting



### Supporting Activities

- Provide children with chunky mark-making tools which are easier to hold in a fisted grip, eg, chunky crayons, chalks or felt-tips
- Give children large pieces of paper or large pieces of chalk to draw on the floor, which encourages movement using the whole arm

## Digital Pronate Grip

- All fingers are holding the pencil
- The wrist is turned so the palm is facing downwards, towards the page
- The pointer finger, the 'digit,' points to the tip of the mark-making tool
- Most of the movement comes from the elbow
- Horizontal, vertical and circular lines can be copied with this grip
- Children may prefer vertical surfaces to draw and paint on
- It is typically seen in children aged 2 – 3 years



### Supporting Activities

- Provide children with varied activities and opportunities that strengthen their arms and wrists
- Give children the opportunity to throw large balls or beanbags and to climb on climbing frames
- Encourage children to paint vertically, such as on a painting easel or outside using paintbrushes to paint water onto walls
- Stick paper to the underside of tables and allow children to draw whilst lying on their back

## Splayed Four-Finger Grip

- The four fingers are held on the pencil, opposite the thumb
- An arch is beginning to form between the thumb and the index finger
- Movement is coming from the wrist
- Hand and fingers move together
- Zigzag lines, crossed lines and simple representations of people can be drawn with this grip

### Supporting Activities

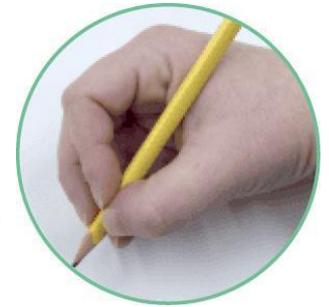
- Provide children with opportunities to develop hand strength, to help them to maintain the arch of the palm while using mark-making tools. Children could practise using hole punches

## Splayed Four-Finger Grip Supporting Activities cont...

- and spray bottles
- Help to stabilise the wrist during activities, such as using a rolling pin with playdough or twisting lids off bottles
- Encourage children to cup their hand when holding an object

## Static Tripod and Quadropod Grip

- A static tripod grip is a three-finger grip. The thumb, index finger and middle finger work as one unit
- A static quadropod grip is when a fourth finger is part of the grip
- Movement is coming from the wrist
- Simple shapes, such as triangles, circles and squares, can be copied using this grip
- It is typically seen in children aged 3 – 4 years



### Supporting Activities

- Provide children with opportunities to develop finger strength, dexterity and independent finger movement
- Sing rhymes that involve finger movements, such as 'Tommy Thumb' and 'This Little Piggy'
- Finger paint using the thumb, index and middle finger
- Practise picking up small items, such as pom-poms or counters, using just the thumb, index and middle fingers
- Provide children with pencil grips and triangular pencils / crayons



## Dynamic Tripod Grip

- The thumb, index and middle finger hold the pencil in a stable position
- The ring and little fingers are bent and rest on the table, helping to stabilise the hand
- The index finger and thumb form an open space
- Dynamic movement is coming from the fingertips
- The pencil can be used accurately and efficiently and letters can be formed correctly using this grip
- It is typically seen in children aged 4 – 5 years



### Supporting Activities

- Encourage children to use their Pincer Grip during everyday activities, such as when threading small beads
- Continue to build strength in fingers and the arch of the palm, eg, by using clothes pegs and tweezers to pick up and release small objects
- To help to ensure the ring and little finger do not become part of the pencil grip, you can give children a small object to hold with those two fingers, eg a pom-pom or small cotton wool ball

## Is the Dynamic Tripod Grip the correct Pencil Grip?

Yes and No! While many people view the Dynamic Tripod Grip to be the most efficient grip, it is not the only functional grip for handwriting. (In Reception, we prefer to use the term 'functional grip' rather than 'correct grip.' A functional grip is one which will allow the child to move their fingers independently to form marks, enabling near writing without getting easily tired or suffering discomfort.)

All of the following Pencil Grips are considered 'functional' and are perfectly suitable for producing neat writing...

### Is the Dynamic Tripod Grip the correct Pencil Grip cont...?

All of the following Pencil Grips are considered 'functional' and are perfectly suitable for producing neat writing...

- Dynamic Tripod Grip – as explained above. This provides a good balance of both stability and freedom of movement
- Static Tripod Grip – as explained above. This adds more stability but limits freedom of movement
- Quadrupod Grip – as explained above
- Lateral Tripod Grip – the use of 3 fingers: Index, Middle and Thumb (or 4 for a Lateral quadruped Grip) but in this grip the thumb crosses over the shaft of the pencil, often resting against the Index finger instead of the pencil)

Knowing what your child's pencil grip should typically look like for their age should help ensure that you are not trying to push your child into adopting a certain style of pencil grip before they are developmentally ready. Pushing little hands before they are developmentally ready can be detrimental. It is very important to develop their gross and fine motor muscles (upper body, shoulder and wrist muscles as well as the small muscles of their fingers.) This is best achieved through play with activities such as outdoor play, jumping, climbing but also by encouraging drawing, craft activities, play-dough and malleables and threading. In school we will provide a wide range of activities to develop the children's gross and fine motor skills as part of their first writing experiences.

X-Ray of a  
7 year old  
Child's Hand



X-Ray of a  
5 year old  
Child's Hand

These X-Ray images of a developed hand (around the age of 7) compared to a Reception-aged child's hand are very informative. It is worth noting that it is not only the size of the child's hand which changes. The younger child has cartilage which will eventually become bone through the process of endocrinal ossification. This occurs around the ages of 6 – 8 years (and usually earlier in girls than boys).

It is important to think about handwriting, handwriting development and pencil grip occurring in an age-appropriate way, matched to each child's physical development. We will introduce Handwriting practice after the children's physical foundations have been thoroughly embedded.

If your child would like to practise their mark-making, handwriting, name writing, drawing or painting before your child starts school, please encourage it – but do not force it! We do not expect any child to come to school being able to write their name and all letters of the alphabet – they will have plenty of opportunity to do this in our Reception class.