Adaptations to Increase Grip on Writing Utensils

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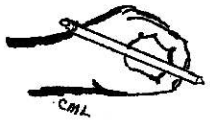
Several occupational therapists contributed ideas for this list of fine motor activities. Before engaging in any fine motor tasks, several areas should be addressed including posture, sensory processing issues, trunk and shoulder stability, visual motor and visual perceptual skills, and hand functioning. Once these areas have been addressed as needed, the following fine motor activities may be helpful to improve your child's fine motor issues. Thanks to the therapists who contributed the following ideas:

Experiment with a variety of writing modifications to find the level of support appropriate for the child's hand strength and skill level. With the appropriate modification, the child should be able to maintain all the joints of the index finger and thumb in a flexed position.

Very weak hands

Weak

Normal Strength



Principle: For a very weak hand, use larger surfaced items to maintain an open web space while writing or coloring and implement hand strengthening activities.

Fabricated pencil holders/grips
(See list on the next page for ideas)
Benik thumb splint

Principle: Decrease support as hand strength improves, as shown by the child becoming more capable of maintaining an open web space with rounded joints.

Evo –Pens (Pocket Full of Therapy)
Grip Tech® Pencils (OT Ideas, PFOT)
The Pencil Grip (OT Ideas, PFOT)
Start Right™ Grip (OT Ideas, PFOT)
Hand Hugger Pencils (Triarco)
Triangle pencil grips

Principle: Use the minimum intervention that a child needs to maintain an open web space. Also, use prompts and monitoring of proper positioning on the pencil.

Short ½" crayon pieces
Regular diameter-triangular pencils
Stetro Grips (OT Ideas, PFOT)
Pencil Pals (OT Ideas)
Regular Pencils
Verbal prompts

1. Wrap a **rubber band around the pencil** about one inch up from where the point begins and have the child place their fingers on the rubber band to reduce slippage.

2. **Try alternative types of pencils.** Use pencils with indentations in them for the fingers. Another alternative is larger pencils. Hand Huggers (Available until Oct-Nov 2003 from Triarco Art Supply # 732745, 800-328-3360, $3.50 a dozen, ask for Jen if help is needed) are large triangular pencils that work well for weaker hands. The flat surfaces of the triangle reduce the rotation of the pencil in the fingers, making it easier to stabilize. Occasionally, triangle shaped pencils of a regular diameter can be found at some art stores with the drawing pencils. Generally, the child can experiment with the diameters and determine which gives them the most control. Children with weaker hands tend to prefer the larger Hand Hugger Pencil. As strength improves, the child will want to transition to a smaller diameter.

3. **Ball crayons** (possibly available through educational catalogs). The inside of the crayon may be stuffed with cotton, so the child doesn't stick his index finger inside.

4. **Animal markers or Scrollies** (available through Pocket Full of Therapy and intermittently at Costco and Target). These are egg shaped markers that support an open web space, which work well for young children and children with weak hands.

5. **Homemade crayons:** put cupcake papers inside mini-cupcake pans. Then put crayons broken into small pieces into the papers (make the crayons about a 1/2" thick). Then warm in the oven at 170 degrees or less until they melt. Stir with a toothpick as needed. The crayons can be cut in half to make half circles, which work really well.

6. Put the crayon, pencil, paintbrush, etc. in the clip of the **clothespin**.

7. **Experiment with a variety of commercially available products.** There are differences with resistance level of the coloring agent and diameters. Some possibilities to try are: *Twist-down crayons*, (Walmart, educational catalogs, dollar stores, etc.) *Color Slick crayons* by Crayola (Walmart), or *oil pastels, grease pens*.

8. Make a **dowel crayon holder**: Using a 5-inch long, 1-1/4 inch in diameter dowel, drill a hole to match the crayon about 1-1/2 inches from one end. When the crayon is inserted, it sticks up perpendicular from the dowel and can be secured with a rubber band wrapped around it and the dowel.

9. **Use an antenna ball** and cut a hole in it to fit a crayon or broken pencil. Then if the child has difficulty holding it you can put Velcro on the sides and make a Velcro loop for the child's hand to help stabilize it.

10. **Plastic golf balls** with holes in them – stick pencil/crayon through the hole.

11. Fabricate the grips from is **Sculpey Clay**, it hardens with baking in the oven. It is available in craft areas and is commonly used to make jewelry. Put a cylinder foam pencil grip on the pencil and form the clay around the foam grip, in the shape of an enlarged "The Pencil Grip," modeling the clay to fit the child's hand. Take out the foam grip and bake according to package directions, turning it over one time in the middle of the baking. The foam grip will hold the Sculpey Grip in place, but it tends to wear out with use, so replace these as needed. Some therapists have also used **Crayola Model Magic** to fabricate grips from.

12. Use **three hair ties** (the thick softer kind) sewn together in a row. The middle one goes over the wrist. Then if the child needs a pronated position, put the crayon between the index and middle fingers and put one loop over the top of the crayon on the back of the hand, and the other loop under the palm of the hand over the top of the crayon. If the child has some supination, the loops and crayon can be adjusted so that the crayon is positioned in the web space. This worked well with other objects, not just crayons (such as spoons) and was inexpensive and easy to make! There are two sizes of thick hair bands; using the softer slightly larger ones for the wrist and then the smaller ones for the loops on the sides works well.