

Heavy pencil pressure

Compiled by Linda Cammaroto

This list is compiled from information shared by OT's on the school list serve.

1. Try a mouse pad under the paper. Or a sheet of dycem, either the regular dycem to place under their paper (not to stabilize it, but to force them to decrease the pressure). What works even better is **Rubbermaid rubber-backed shelf liners**. It's has a waffled texture and really puts holes in the paper if a student uses too much pressure (and is much cheaper than dycem as well). It comes on a roll and I usually purchase it at Wal-Mart. Eventually they will learn how to ease the pressure. It's a training tool, so hopefully when they learn how to lighten the pressure they won't need this modification. I've had students who were resistive to using this technique, but I explain that it's a training tool and they won't have to write like that for the rest of their lives. I also tell them that if they keep pressing too hard their hands will tire very fast, so this will help them with that as well. And I point out that it will be easier for other people to read their writing if it's not too dark and has a lot of erasures.

2. You might also have them try using a **few sheets of construction paper as a "blotter"** under their writing paper. This can add some feedback.

3. Another idea is to have the student write on their **3 ring binders**, if they are the slightly padded nylon type. Not only do they have the advantage of the "slant" but their pressure decreases or they will put holes in the paper.

4. Have the student either use a **#3 pencil** (which isn't as dark as #2 when the student uses too much pressure) or a **mechanical pencil** (in which the lead would continue to break until the child learned not to exert too much pressure when writing-**It's instant feedback**). When a child uses too much pressure, they usually have issues with proprioception, so it is also give those children theraputty to keep in their desks (in a container, of course) that they can use to "warm up their hands for writing" (give them proprioceptive input prior to writing).

5. Some of these children have difficulty shifting the weight in their hands and only use the little finger side of the hand to provide stability for the hand. They may also have sensorimotor or perceptual problems and use the deep pressure on the pencil to give their brains feedback as to how the pencil is moving on the paper. Some tips for helping them to learn to shift the weight of their hand toward the little finger side, and use the index, middle and thumb to hold the pencil are as follows:

---Play with clay, rolling and flattening it with the little finger side of the hand. Explain to students that this is where the child needs to press when writing, not on the tip of the pencil.

----Ghost writing. Have the child write a word lightly on the paper and then erase it without leaving any marks. The child winds if they can do this. Cue them by saying, "Lift the pencil tip off of the paper" as they write.

----Reward programs work for some children (just be careful not to be critical of children's handwriting. It can backfire on you. Children need praise for their attempts and rewards for each little step closer to their goal).

----Verbal cues before a writing assignment to write lightly may be helpful.

----**10 push-ups before writing can relax the hand and prepare it for writing.** My own son had this problem of writing too darkly, and 10 push-ups before, and even during an assignment helped relax the tension that would develop in his hand as he wrote and help him to write lighter.