



Pencil Pressure

Developing appropriate pencil pressure is a skill that children need to learn. Children may find it hard to judge the amount of pressure needed when writing/ drawing and this pressure may fluctuate from task to task depending on the writing implement and the surface used. In addition, writing pressure on the paper is usually related to the tension of the pencil grip.

- For children with **tense** pencil grips the writing pressure is **high** and their writing becomes smaller and smaller.
- For children with *weak* pencil grips the writing pressure is often *low* and their writing deteriorates over time
- Some children's pressure may fluctuate over time. These children usually have poor proprioceptive feedback.



Activities to develop MORE pencil pressure:

- Place a sheet of carbon paper and plain paper under the writing paper. Encourage the lighter writer to make a carbon copy by placing more pressure through the pencil.
- Crayon rubbing: have the children see if they can rub across different textured surfaces, hard or soft. Try leave, bark or even make Lego patterns. Talk about what happens when you press too hard, or not enough. Scan the QR code for ideas.
- Erasing: To rub out pencil marks, pressure is needed. Make it an activity by encouraging the creation of patterns on a pencil shaded area.
- Carpet samples: Have the child draw shapes on a carpet tile. For the child who does not press hard enough the carpet adds resistance and encourages them to press harder.
- Playdough: Have the child roll out playdough and then use a pencil to draw shapes etc. in it. Try making deep tracks in the dough, or place the dough on top of a piece of paper and see if you can make marks on the paper, through the dough.
- Scratch Art: Try drawing and writing on special scratch art paper, use a special pencil like tool to scrape away the black top layer and your child will see their handiwork come to life in rainbow colours underneath.



Adaptations

Experiment with a variety of pens that require varying degrees of pressure. Using whiteboard markers can be useful to practise letter and shape formation, however they do not encourage enough pressure for pencil use. If development of pencil pressure continues to be difficult, try a pencil that has heavier lead, this will make it easier to make a mark.

Light up pens can also be a good way of visually letting the child know when they are applying enough pressure.

Activities to encourage LESS pencil pressure:

- Place pieces of carbon copy paper between multiple layers of paper. Encourage your child to write on the top sheet, and then look to see which layer of paper the writing has transferred through to. On the next attempts, see if they can write lighter so as not to go down so many layers.
- Practise grading force whilst painting, using charcoal, or thin crayons - try different strokes – light, medium, then heavy. Whilst painting try to use the tip of the brush, rather than flattening the bristles against the paper. Encourage the use of consistent pressure whilst painting lines across the page, so that the width of the painted line stays the same. You could also try practising swirly shapes or other graphic patterns.
- Colour in a picture using a grey lead pencil, try to get different shades from the same pencil, discuss how different pressure creates different shades.
- Try drawing on a balloon without making it 'pop' you can use a felt tip pen or a ballpoint pen, which one works better?
- Try writing on paper which is placed on top of different soft surfaces (e.g. a mouse mat, dishcloth or dycem). Turn the paper over afterwards, ask your child to close their eyes and see if they can feel the writing on the page? Can they feel any holes? Try writing on single sheet of paper on a firm surface? Is there any difference in how the paper feels?
- Try drawing with a mechanical / propelling pencil or pop-a-point pencil with push down leads, can your child draw a picture/make patterns or write words without breaking the lead?

Adaptations

It can be helpful to remind your child to relax their hand/arm/shoulder before and during writing activities, but if you find that your child still has a tense grip and complains of fatigue in their hands or arms or stops regularly to shake out their wrists, you may find it useful to try the follow adaptations.

- Experiment with different pens and pencils – try a gel or rollerball pen, or a pen with a wider shaft. The Stabilo easy Start Handwriting range is a good place to start.
- Alternatively you could try a sponge or 'ultra grip' pencil grip, however these will only fit on a pen/pencil with a narrow shaft.
- An angled writing surface will help to support a better position for your child when writing.

