

WHAT IS OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY?

"Occupational Therapy is a health profession in which therapists and therapy assistants help individuals to do and engage in the specific activities that make up daily life. For children and youth in schools, occupational therapy works to ensure that a student can participate in the full breadth of school activities--from paying attention in class; concentrating on the task at hand; holding a pencil, musical instrument, or book in the easiest way; or just behaving appropriately in class."

(Information retrieved from the American Occupational Therapy Association)

http://www.aota.org/Consumers/WhatisOT/CY/Articles/School_consumer.aspx

What are handwriting problems?

- Knowing how to form letters and numbers from memory
- Letter/Number orientation (direction the letters/numbers are facing)
- Placement of the letters/numbers on the lines of the paper
- Size of the letters/numbers
- Starting the letters/numbers at the proper place
- How to sequence the formation of the letters/numbers
- Spacing between letters and words
- Handwriting control, neatness, and overall legibility

What factors contribute to these difficulties?

Handwriting problems can be caused by external factors, internal factors, or a combination of both.

- **External Factors**
 - Height of the child's desk and chair is improper and does not "fit" the child
 - Poor or inconsistent handwriting instruction
 - Child may be placed too far away from the blackboard to see how to properly form the letters

- **Internal Factors**
 - Unrecognized vision problems
 - Poor grip strength and/or endurance
 - Poor eye-hand coordination
 - Poor posture
 - Proprioceptive/Kinesthetic issues
 - Child is not holding pencil properly
 - Motor planning difficulties
 - Poor shoulder and/or wrist stability
 - Delayed fine motor development

What are the consequences for children with poor handwriting?

- Poor grades
 - May be perceived as “lazy” by teachers and peers
 - May not finish assignments because their hand becomes tired
 - May have difficulty taking notes
 - Difficulty understanding school assignments because so much energy is focused on trying to produce legible handwriting
- May miss out on social activities, such as recess, because so much energy is focused on trying to produce legible handwriting
- Lowered Self-esteem

How can occupational therapy help children remediate handwriting problems?

-Handwriting difficulties are the #1 reason for referral to occupational therapy services in schools. Occupational therapy helps children improve their handwriting through identifying the internal or external factors that are contributing to a child's handwriting difficulties, and teaches the student and/or the classroom teacher how to remediate these difficulties.

How do I access OT services?

- OT in the schools

- If you are concerned about your child's handwriting, talk to your child's teacher about receiving occupational therapy services in the school.

- The principal of your child's school or the special education director are other resources for obtaining information about receiving occupational therapy services in the school.

- The occupational therapy association in your state is another resource with contact information.

Kentucky's OT Association: <http://www.kotaweb.org/>

- Handwriting summer camps

Handwriting camps are held during summer breaks at the Model Laboratory School in Richmond, KY. For more information, contact Julie Baltisberger at Julie.baltisberger@eku.edu .

What can I do as a parent?

- Be an advocate for your child:

Do not be intimidated to ask your child's teacher or principal for their time to discuss accessing occupational therapy services in the school for your child. They have your child's best interest at heart and want to see them be successful.

- Helping your child improve his/her handwriting:

You can visit the site: <http://www.hwtears.com/parents/parentextras> to print free "Letter Formation Charts" for your child to practice letter formation. Remember that kids need plenty of encouragement and praise when they are learning new things that may be difficult for them to master.

- Parents Frequently Asked Questions about OT Services in Schools

The American Occupational Therapy Association provides answers to your questions as well as tips for helping your child to better handwriting.

Parents Questions: <http://www.aota.org/Consumers/Tips/Youth/Schools/38523.aspx>

Help Your Child to Better Handwriting Tip Sheet: [Handwriting Tip Sheet.pdf](#)

Toys that can Help Improve Children's Handwriting

- **Silly Putty** can help your children increase the strength in his/her hands. Try hiding small toys or coins in the putty for your child to find to encourage them to really manipulate the putty with their hands.
- **Art easel-** Encourage children to practice artwork and writing spelling words on the vertical surface of an easel. Writing upright requires arm and shoulder movements and affects the position of the wrist and thumb. The best easels for fine motor development are ones that require children to stand and have a steeper angle, because they make children further extend the wrist back toward the shoulder.
- The **"Operation"** board game from Hasbro- Using the tweezers to extract items from the "patient" develops muscles required for pencil grasp. Be mindful that this game is intended for children age 6 and up due to the small pieces.
- **Play Dough Activity Sets-** The kneading and pulling of play dough allows children to strengthen the small muscles of their hands. Purchasing a dough tool kit will help keep the child's interest in the activity and allow opportunities to use different hand muscles for different play activities with the dough. Children can also make letters out of the dough to practice letter familiarization.

- **The "Toys R Us" website** has ideas for toys that can help your child enhance their fine motor and handwriting skills. You can access this site and order the toys online at: <http://toysrus.com>. On the Toys R Us homepage, click on "Category", then go to "Learning" on the drop-down menu and click "More". There, you can click on "Reading & Writing" to take you to a page that displays toys that can help your child develop his or her handwriting readiness.

Toy information retrieved from:

http://kids-toys.suite101.com/article.cfm/fine_motor_skill_educational_toys