



# Hand Strength

Children with Down syndrome often have reduced grip and pinch strength and so it is important to practice hand strength activities frequently to aid handwriting skills.

## Activities

- ▶ Squeezing out water from large sponges.
- ▶ Using chalk on playground floor and walls.
- ▶ Painting, drawing or printing onto an easel (increases shoulder stability).
- ▶ Drawing with fingers in sand.
- ▶ Ping pong football – use empty squeeze bottles (washing up liquid bottles work well) to blow ping pong balls back and forth across the table to friends.
- ▶ Pegs on a flowerpot – encourage children to clip easy squeeze pegs around the rim of a flower pot, encourage the use of tips of index and middle fingers and thumb.
- ▶ Playdoh – roll out a sausage. Pinch all the way along using the tip of fingers and thumb. Roll up the sausage into a ball and push straight fingers into the ball of putty.
- ▶ Friends or teaching staff can hide a small, motivating toy in a ball of putty for child to extract.
- ▶ Popping bubble wrap with finger and thumb. Take turns with another child until all the bubbles are popped.
- ▶ Use a container with a lid and place a small toy, sparkly paper, feather or word inside. Encourage child to stabilise the box with non-dominant hand and dominant hand opens the box to retrieve what's inside.
- ▶ Pick up cotton wool balls with large tweezers or tongs.
- ▶ Bead threading.

# Writing

Once children have developed their early pre-printing skills at larger paper and at an easel or similar set up, he or she is ready to begin working at a desk.

It is very important to ensure that children are sat in a comfortable position for writing practice.

- ▶ Straight back.
- ▶ Feet flat on floor or supported on a box.
- ▶ Right angles at hips, knees and ankles.
- ▶ Clearance between back of knees and seat should be approximately 2 fingers width.
- ▶ Ensure that there is a comfortable space between top of knees and table.
- ▶ Head in a central position – discourage child lying forwards onto arm or onto table with head down.

## Pens and writing tools

- ▶ Children with Down syndrome often have low visual acuity (think looking through Perspex instead of glass) so a black pen is preferable to a pencil. Paper should be white/buff or very pale.
- ▶ White boards and markers (take photographs as evidence for books if necessary).
- ▶ A tripod grip should be encouraged – thumb and 1st, 2nd fingers.
- ▶ Experiment with different pens and pen grips. Brands like Stablo make a variety.
- ▶ A rubber band wrapped around the shaft of the pen, 3cm up from the nib can make a cheap, useful grip.
- ▶ Some children benefit from using a writing slope. Trial using a ring binder as a makeshift slope initially.
- ▶ Keep desk writing activities relatively brief to begin with. Due to lower muscle tone many children find it difficult and tiring to sit up straight at a desk for an extended time.
- ▶ Letter tracing activities are a good place to start. Magic markers allow children to trace over an adult's letters and change the colour of the writing as they trace.



# Helpful resources

- ▶ Praise and encouragement
- ▶ Working For Boards
- ▶ Motivating rewards
- ▶ Black pen
- ▶ Magic/colour change markers
- ▶ White or pale paper
- ▶ Mini white boards
- ▶ White board markers
- ▶ Electronic timers
- ▶ Sand timers
- ▶ Writing slopes
- ▶ Wedge cushions
- ▶ Foot block
- ▶ Tactile letters eg sandpaper letters
- ▶ Easy grip scissors / push down table scissors
- ▶ Playdoh / therapeutic putty
- ▶ Pen grips



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