

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 Binding 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 wins 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.

Writes too Lightly

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We often see this problem when children have weakness in their hands and poor finger dexterity. Some have poor sensory awareness. They have difficulty pushing on the pencil tip without the pencil slipping out of their hands. You may also see fingertip grasp patterns. Here are some ideas picked up from other OT's over the years:

1. When working with children who write too **lightly**, see if they can (with a little prompting from you) make the pressure adjustment themselves. After setting them up properly (re: posture, position, and grip) and they start writing lightly, tell them that you have bad eyes and that you can't see anything they are writing. Instinctively they will begin to apply more pressure. If the pressure is appropriate, ask them to start writing that way all the time.
2. Place a piece of **carbon paper between the worksheet** (or whatever paper the child is writing on) and a blank piece of paper. Tell the child that this is a game of "magic," and if they press real hard when they write or draw), it will come through on the blank piece of paper, like magic.
3. Place a sheet of **sandpaper** under the sheet they are coloring. Stabilize everything with a clipboard.
3. Some children may be seeking proprioception because they are not getting enough feedback when writing. Try some **heavy work activities/deep pressure/proprioception** aka a sensory diet. I've also used different writing surfaces and different implements to write or color with, such as e.g. brushes and watercolor. You might try having the class do a **color wheel** where you apply graded pressure from dark to very light. .
4. Take turns with a **Squiggle Wiggle pen** (available at Wal-mart).
5. When all else fails, use **markers**.
6. Rollerball pens and **thicker lead pencils** can be tried.
7. Some stores carry crayon holders shaped like a cartoon character. When the crayon is pushed down with enough pressure, it either makes a noise or plays music, depending on the character. Have to look around. Sometimes found in toy stores. Hearing the noise or the music is incentive for some students to push harder.
8. Small wrist weight or hand weights (to give more sensory input to muscles and joints).
9. **Short pencils or crayons, which promote a better grip**. I save all small pieces of chalk or break up my chalk. Hard to hold it improperly if its just a little bitty piece.

10. Try using a **number 1 pencil** which has softer lead and requires less force to produce a darker result.
11. Crayola has recently come out with crayons called **Color Slicks** (Wal-mart). Their purpose is to produce more vivid colors without the need for as much pressure or coloring over and over on the same spot.
12. Try wrapping 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.
13. Use those **rubbing plates**-kids love them and you have to press down hard to see the picture appear.
14. Clothes pin activities for **developing finger strength**-have children form fingers into an "O" as doing it.
15. **Weight bearing activities** on the arms such as wheel barrow walks, crab walks, bear walks.

AND LAST BUT NOT LEAST

16. Use a **vertical surface** such as chalkboard, or slant board part of the day. The chalkboard is underused in most schools but remains the **BEST** surface for learning to write.

Child's Name _____

Date _____

KINESTHETIC AWARENESS
Classroom and Individual Practice
CONTROLLING PRESSURE

Purpose

To improve awareness and control of pressure exerted on writing implement during paper-and-pencil activities

Positioning

Child sits at desk or table with forearms supported on work surface so that larger (more forceful) arm muscles are not used for activities. Writing implements are gripped correctly. (Grippers or other cues may help.)

Preparation

Tension in the hand or arm often results in excessive force. If arm or hand is stiff or tense, work on relaxation activities for a few minutes before beginning this kind of activity. Remind child to relax arm during the activity, if necessary.

Activities

Any activity that involves focusing on pressure, with visual or auditory feedback, will help to develop pressure awareness and discrimination skills.

1. Child uses paintbrush with soft bristles (sable works well) to paint lines of various colors from left to right across paper. Adult encourages child to use consistent pressure so that each line is the same width across the page, and to use only the tip of the brush (not to flatten the bristles). Child circles places where width varies and attempts to improve performance so that fewer width changes occur on successive attempts. When child can quickly paint several lines with little variation in width, child adds finger movements to paint wavy lines. Finally, child works on keeping pressure consistent with eyes closed, using only the "feel" for guidance.
2. Encourage child to experiment with a soft lead pencil until lines are of the desired darkness and width. Cut out the desired line and tape it to the desk as a model for monitoring pressure. Child continues to draw lines, and eventually shapes, letters, or pictures, while maintaining the darkness and line width of the model. When this can be done easily, child practices maintaining the same pressure with eyes closed, visually comparing the product with the model periodically.