



## Physical Development

### **‘Running before walking, playing before writing’**

*Physical development is one of the three prime areas of learning and development, these are all intrinsically link and therefore support and scaffold each other, this is why Bridge the Gap are so passionate about all three of these areas and understand their development to be an important component to long-term child mental health and well-being.*

As parents it is natural to worry about what our child should be doing to be keeping up with typical development, and certainly when it comes to them being ‘school ready’. What better preparation for school could there be than starting them off in their writing! I mean, they go to school and they write, so that is probably one of the things that it is best to focus on, right? So how do we prepare our children to be ready to write? Rather than answering that question, I am going to say – do not! Here is why.

For a child to write effectively long term they first must be able to use what is known as a ‘dynamic tripod grip’. This basically means that they can hold their pencil between 2 fingers and create the movement from their thumb, fingers, and fingertips. Most children master this grip between the ages of 6 and 7 (another example as evidence that we send our children to school too young in this country). The education system is keen to get children writing from a young age, an age where not even all the small bones in their wrists are developed. As their parents, it is important that we recognise that it is not *usual* for children to write from a young age. In fact, with children starting at school so young in this country, we need to be informed enough to know what we can do to support children appropriately on their learning journey.





*'An x ray of a developed hand (around the age of 7) compared to an EYFS age child's hand is pretty informative. Occupational therapists issue fantastic advice on how to develop handwriting in an age appropriate way matched to children's physical development. It is worth noting that it's not just the size of the child's hand which changes. The younger child has cartilage which will eventually become bone through the process for endochondral ossification, this occurs around the ages of 6-8yrs.'*

**Ruth Swailes - School Improvement Advisor, Education consultant and Founder Member of Firm Foundations**

All of this is not to say they shouldn't be encouraged to use pencils and crayons *before* they've grasped this grip (keep them chunky) - they should, and there are many ways to do that without encouraging them to write. This is referred to as 'mark making'.

Pre-schoolers are developing. It's important that, if a child hasn't reached a stage of development, we don't allow the urgency of getting them 'school ready' take over and end up pushing them into something they are not developmentally ready for. Children need time to play and explore in different ways to build their strength, in both their gross motor skills and their pincer grip.

### Core and Shoulder Strength







Supporting your child's gross motor skills (**big physical skills**) is a fantastic way to help them be ready to write. Think about sitting at a table and writing, just think for a minute of all that is involved. For us it is so easy, we do it without even thinking, but children have not the finely tuned physical skills that we have as adults; let us break it down a little.

Getting ready to write is about SO much more than having a pencil and paper to hand.

- Facilitate an environment that encourages lots of crawling, reaching, climbing, and balancing to help build their core and shoulder strength, so important for writing.
- Make dens, draw under tables, crawl, play with cars, puzzles, and small world toys on the floor.
- Give them open ended resources to allow their imagination to flourish; this will help them to have ideas about what to write when the time comes.

Finally, *continue* to do this even when they are older, it will continue to benefit them as they grow - oh, and do not forget to have fun with it all!

### Pincer Grip

Developing a good quality pincer grip is an important part of being able to use the dynamic tripod grip needed for writing. Finger strength is an important part of this and there are lots of fun activities that you can do to help, without even picking up a pencil.





- Think outside the box. When it comes to these activities it is not necessary to spend money on toys, there is so much we can utilise around the home. Children really enjoy using more open-ended resources so see what they do with the resources themselves, you can model and play alongside them but try not to hijack their thought process.
- I love playdough and all the opportunities it creates for fine motor development, squeezing it in our hands, doing dough disco and pushing different buttons into it are just a couple of examples.
- Threading in lots of different ways, utilising pegs, children's tweezers, and chopsticks, posting buttons through a home-made letter box (shoe box with a fine hole made in the lid), baking and shaving foam in a tray. An old jar with elastic bands to put over and peeling stickers off their page and decorating a box or picture.

There is so much fun to be had, children often engage better with these open-ended resources than they do with fancy, shiny toys so have a look round and see what you may be able to utilise.

### In Summary

So, what can we do?

- Lots of gross motor play – climbing, crawling, and balancing.
- Children who have not experienced crawling for long, or who have missed that stage out altogether, can benefit greatly from extra activities that will develop their core and shoulder strength. Crawling through tunnels and lots of floor play helps to bridge the gap for those children who missed this stage of development.
- Mark making using their gross motor skills (using the movement from the shoulder) with paintbrushes and water with a wall to reach up to, chalk on the garden path, using fingers to write in a tray of rice/cornflower/sand.
- Mark making whilst lying on their front using white boards and chunky markers.
- Singing songs like 'Heads, shoulders, knees and toes' and 'one finger one thumb, keep moving' while carrying out the actions.
- Pegging things and using large tweezers to transfer pasta or pom poms from one bowl to another.
- Play dough, encouraging the squeezing of the dough to strengthen the finger and hand muscles.
- Getting dressed! Give them time to practice putting on socks and doing buttons (great for helping them with their pincer grip) and putting on jumpers and coats. Dressing their teddies and dolls is also a great way to encourage their skills.
- Use prepositional language in play – up, down, under, over – this helps when we are teaching them how to form letters.

Children develop holistically, it is not as simple as 'teaching them to write', it is making sure they are READY to write. And with the right environment and loving support from you, they will most certainly get there.

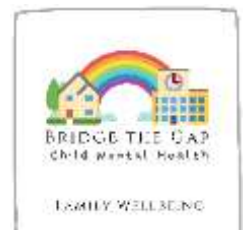


Walking before running.

Playing before writing.

*Created by Bridge the Gap Child Mental Health*

[jwbridgethegap.com](http://jwbridgethegap.com)    [facebook.com/jwbridgethegap](https://facebook.com/jwbridgethegap)    [instagram.com/bridgethegap\\_cmh](https://instagram.com/bridgethegap_cmh)



### Recommended Read

The Ultimate Guide to Mark Making in the Early Years by Sue Cowley

