

Occupational Therapy Tip Sheet

HEAVY PENCIL PRESSURE



What is heavy pencil pressure?

- Heavy pencil pressure means pressing too hard on a pencil when writing or colouring.

Why is proper pencil pressure important?

- To improve the speed and neatness of writing
- To decrease hand fatigue and soreness

What are some causes of heavy pencil pressure?

- Weak hand or finger strength
- Poor pencil grasp
- Difficulty with sensory processing (seeking heavy pressure, poor awareness of body in space)

A child that applies heavy pencil pressure may do the following:

- Break pencil tips
- Draw very dark letters and pictures
- Smudge lines and handwriting
- Tear paper while writing or drawing
- Be unable to erase mistakes due to dark writing (erased words can still be seen)
- Switch hands due to fatigue

Practice the following strategies to improve pencil pressure:

- Mystery Writing: write something light enough that when erased, it cannot be seen.
- Use a mechanical pencil to keep pressure light so the lead doesn't break.
- Use paper on top of corrugated cardboard, styrofoam or a mouse pad and draw a picture without poking the pencil through the paper
- Ensure the pencil tip is sharp (a mechanical pencil is always sharp and may be beneficial).
- Practice shading during colouring. Choose one coloured pencil and shade each section of a picture differently by how much pressure is used.
- Use a weighted pencil or hand/wrist weights to increase input to the hand (see an Occupational Therapist for a weighted pencil or try placing a hex nut on the pencil to add weight).



- Use a pencil grip to relax the hand and help position fingers.
- Use a slant board to help position wrist and hand.



