

“Help! My child is having problems with... Handwriting”

WITH OCCUPATIONAL THERAPIST ALISON CAIRNS



Hello; my name is Alison Cairns and I am an HCPC registered Paediatric Occupational Therapist working locally with children aged 0-19 years. I qualified in 1989 and have spent the last 19 years working with children. As a mum myself I know how important it is for children to develop good handwriting skills. However, in my professional career my colleagues and I are aware that some children find handwriting difficult.



Although it is often parents who will highlight worries about their child's handwriting, children too can be affected by anxiety and low self-esteem and will often avoid handwriting due to difficulties with the skill. Specific problems may range from poor hand eye coordination, poor pencil grip position, to poor memory for letter formation.

Handwriting is taught formally within infant school education and should progress from printed letters to 'joined up' cursive handwriting by about the age of 7-8 years.

When a child is referred to an Occupational Therapist they will undergo an Occupational Therapy assessment either within the school, home or a clinic environment and the Occupational Therapist will then provide direct / indirect treatment programmes, strategies and advice.

For handwriting the assessment will test a range of skills e.g. balance, postural control, ball skills, fine motor tasks including scissor skills, visual perception (how the brain interprets images from the eyes), plus handwriting and drawing. All done in a child friendly way! I also have fun doing my job.

One specific area of assessment could be the child's ability to copy a series of geometric shapes. This ability shows the child's developmental, sensory, perceptual

and motor abilities within drawing, and is directly connected with handwriting readiness. A child is asked to copy in this order:

I - O + / \ X □ △

Readiness for handwriting is seen where the child can draw an accurate triangle, generally reached at aged 5 years. Assessing the child's needs helps both school and parents support and understand their difficulties. Treatment may be needed to support the child's progress within handwriting and may include fun activities to be practiced regularly either working on the handwriting or on the foundation skills necessary to be handwriting ready.

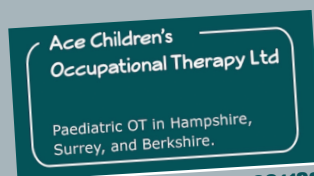
If you have concerns relating to a child's handwriting, then a referral can be made to a Children's Occupational Therapist within the NHS. The referral can be made via your child's pre-school or school by contacting the Special Needs Coordinator or via a GP.

Children's Occupational Therapists also work within Independent Practice and parents are able to self-refer.

If you have any concerns about your own child's handwriting (or any other area of development) - and would like to know more about OT, please give me a call on 01252 691133

Alison

Alison is Registered with the Health Care Professions Council, College of Occupational Therapists in Independent Practice, COT Specialist section - Children Young People and Families, Sensory Integration Network of UK and Ireland.



www.acechildrensoccupationaltherapy.com 01252 691133