

Save the broken crayons - save handwriting

When a crayon breaks, we usually assume we have one of two options: throw the thing out or turn to Pinterest for a very crafty way to use them. There is a third option however – one that is, by far, the most beneficial. Did you know that broken crayons are wonderful tools to promote a more developed pencil grasp pattern for handwriting?

As we grow, the way we hold objects like crayons, chalk, spoons, etc. usually grows as well. From approximately 1 to 1.5 years old, a child holds a crayon in a palmar grasp (all fingers wrapped around the crayon with the pinky closest to the paper). As the now 2-3 year old child continues to use their hands for more complex fine motor tasks such as eating finger foods and playing with toys with smaller pieces, their grasp morphs into a digital grasp (fingers at the top of the crayon, finger tips pointed to the paper).

Playing with toys such as peg puzzles, art activities, and becoming more independent with feeding and dressing leads the 3-4 year old to developing a static tripod grasp (crayon pinched between thumb and index finger, resting on middle finger). From age 4 and on, the child increases control over the tiny muscles in the hand and their grasp eventually becomes more dynamic, flexible, and functional. It is at this time that the child can truly develop their handwriting skills. So, where does a broken crayon fit into this development picture?

When a child attempts to hold a much smaller crayon piece, they automatically pinch the crayon stub between their thumb and index finger. This encourages a tripod grasp and provides perfect practice to continue developing their grasp. This strategy can be translated to other objects as well including small pieces of chalk, golf pencils, and even q-tips for painting.

Even if your child is not yet working on writing their letters and numbers, doing art activities using things like broken crayons can significantly improve their penmanship once they do begin handwriting. To encourage this



development, try the following activities to promote tripod grasp in young children:

- Using chalk on a vertical chalk board (also encourages trunk, shoulder, and upper arm strength – necessary for successful handwriting later on)
- Using broken crayons to draw in facial features on a blank face (have the child complete this activity lying on their stomach, propped on their arms – another position to increase trunk, shoulder, and upper arm endurance)
- Using a q-tip to 'paint their feelings' (also encourages emotional health development)
- Tracing an infinity symbol (rainbow race track) with crayon stubs (the motion forces the hand to cross the child's midline/middle of their body and helps increase brain hemisphere connections as well as ability to complete more complex movements such as dressing, skipping, and yes, handwriting)
- Using push pins to 'trace' simple shapes (appropriate for older preschoolers with supervision)
- Peeling off small stickers and placing them on opposite side of body (crossing midline help)

Most importantly, have fun and allow the activities to do the work of developing skills while you enjoy spending time with your child – broken crayons included!