Helping Your ADHD Child Improve Their Handwriting

by ERIC PATTERSON

ADHD and Handwriting

Everyone has pet peeves. Everyone has an activity that they find particularly torturous. Adults do well to escape and avoid the situations they don't like. Children with ADHD are not as lucky.

ADHD and handwriting don't go well together. Producing accurate, legible handwriting is a task synonymous with torture, pain and anguish for many ADHD kids. This is logical when you consider common symptoms of ADHD compared to what is needed to write well. In ADHD, someone is easily distracted, unable to sit still, restless and fidgety. Additionally, many children with ADHD have poor hand-eye coordination. This is not the recipe for great handwriting.

Help with Handwriting

Though your child may never become a professional calligraphist or scribe, there are measures to improve their abilities. By completing these tasks, not only will their handwriting improve, but they will practice skills related to attention and concentration that will be useful in other settings. Here's how:

- **Talk with teachers.** Any solution begins with accurate identification of the problem. Rather than assuming what your child's limitations are, communicate with teachers to understand their concerns and how atypical your child's writing is. If it is generally legible or not far from the average student, consider pursuing another battle. Otherwise, work to clarify if perfectionism, carelessness or distractibility is the issue. If the problem seems to be related to dyslexia or other learning issues, seek out professional assistance. The school can provide a recommendation.
- **Reward, not punishment.** Children with ADHD are typically skeptical when there is a change in routine and structure. This skepticism leads them to perceive the new activity as a punishment. Be clear with your child that this change will be a positive one because they will be able to earn rewards that they are interested in receiving. Establish duration and intensity of handwriting practice that is required to earn one reward. Be sure to start small to reinforce desire and then extend periods between rewards to maintain motivation.

- **Non-writing activities.** You have to crawl before you can walk, and you have to practice writing without writing. Having your child answer homework questions while you write for them is a good way to judge the role that concentration and comprehension are having with the writing issues. Drawing, painting and coloring use many of the same coordination skills as writing so practicing these will benefit writing. Research some tricks that occupational therapists use to build muscle memory and performance in hands. Lastly, set him up for success by finding pens, pencils and crayons that are a good fit for his hand while practicing a desired grip.
- **Writing activities.** Complete letter drills by having your child writing the same letters and words repeatedly. Have a goal of efficiency rather than speed. Find new ways to explain letter formations that are appealing to your child and work with similar letters that are written in similar way. Using alternative

mediums like sand, finger paint, a chalkboard or the screen of your phone or tablet will add a novelty to the process and limit frustration and burnout. If staying in the lines is the problem, plan to purchase raised-line paper so he can feel barriers to the page. This feedback will reinforce the desired behaviors.

Conclusion

You value the way your child with ADHD communicates to you and the world around him. Knowing the problem, coming from a team stance and practicing non-writing and writing activities will make a positive difference. Be sure to embrace your child's differences. There is no right way to write.