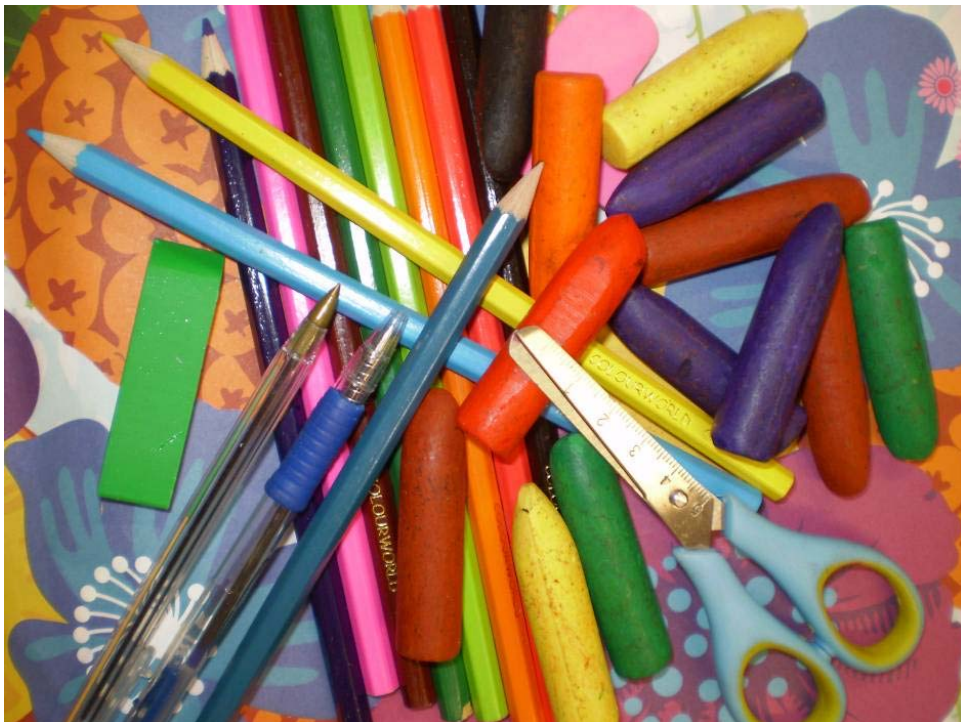


# Occupational therapy school-age referral and resource pack



This pack was designed by the Community Occupational Therapy Team to help school staff improve a child's engagement and participation in school-based activities.

This pack provides ideas on how to address the most common difficulties that we receive referrals for, and explains our referral criteria.

For a number of children, the activities in this pack need to be practiced before making a referral to occupational therapy - the exceptions to this are listed over the page.

# About this advice pack

This resource pack should be used to help children in mainstream schools who are struggling with everyday activities.

It can also be used to support a referral to Occupational Therapy.

The role of the children's occupational therapist (OT) is to work with children, young people and the adults that know them best. Our aim is to help children and young people develop the practical skills they need to take part in, and enjoy, everyday life. These include activities such as:

- self-care - getting washed and dressed, using cutlery, etc
- schoolwork - writing and drawing, using tools, organising themselves, etc.

We do this by looking at the child (what they can do, and what they find difficult), the activity the child needs to do (we call this the occupation) and where the child needs to do this activity (the environment). This is called the PEO model – **p**erson, **o**ccupation, **e**nvironment.

## Who is the pack for?

This pack is predominantly designed for teachers and support staff working in mainstream schools. Some of these strategies may be useful for parents to trial at home.

## Why use the pack?

Lots of children find day-to-day activities difficult, and may take longer to learn new skills. Children make more progress when they carry out activities for a short time each day, rather than one long session per week. Some children may carry out these activities and will no longer need a referral to occupational therapy.

By using this pack you will provide the child with lots of opportunities to practice their skills and have fun. Regular practice with the child will help you to see the progress they are making.

## How to refer to Occupational Therapy

All referrals to Occupational Therapy should be made on the community children's services referral form and emailed to us on, **e:** [gst-tr.evelinacommunityreferrals@nhs.net](mailto:gst-tr.evelinacommunityreferrals@nhs.net)

You can find a copy of our referral form here,

**w:** [www.evelinalondon.nhs.uk/community-occupational-therapy](http://www.evelinalondon.nhs.uk/community-occupational-therapy)

We will consider referrals for:

- children/young people of any age whose physical impairments affect their ability to participate in everyday activities.
- children/young people who are over 5 years old and are struggling with four or more everyday activities, and whose difficulties are not in line with their overall developmental (learning) ability.
- children who are under 5 years old and are struggling with three or more everyday activities, and whose difficulties are not in line with their overall developmental ability
- children with autism who are struggling with three or more everyday activities.

- children who are struggling with some everyday activities, but who do not meet the criteria listed above, can still be referred to Occupational Therapy, provided you have implemented the advice from this pack for at least three months before making a referral. We ask that you record the child's progress throughout the pack, complete the supplementary form provided and include this with your referral.

This pack may not meet the needs of children with specific diagnoses. Please contact the occupational therapy team if you would like to discuss a referral

## How to use the pack

We would advise that the child is supported to carry out the strategies and activity ideas each day for a minimum of 10 minutes. Ideally this should be done for at least five out of seven days. You can do more than this but the child needs to be motivated so that the activities are still fun. The activities should be carried out for three months to allow for progress. These sheets can be used by everyone who knows the child at home and school.

The list below is designed to guide you to the most useful advice sheet for the child's area of difficulty. Identify which difficulties the child is experiencing from the table below and then turn to the relevant worksheet.

Worksheet	Area of difficulty
<b>A</b>	Attention/fidgety
<b>B</b>	Slouches/falls off chair/stool, leans against walls to prop (postural control)
<b>C</b>	Balance skills
<b>D</b>	Ball skills
<b>E</b>	Dressing skills
<b>F</b>	Using cutlery
<b>G</b>	Using scissors
<b>H</b>	Handwriting

## What if they are not improving?

If the child continues to find the activity difficult after three months of regular practice, it may be appropriate for the child to be referred to the occupational therapy team. When referring to Occupational Therapy, please attach the completed worksheets and supplementary referral form.

Remember to make the sessions enjoyable and have fun!

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**Remember GOOD Posture**

- Feet flat on the floor
- Bottom at the back of the chair
- Hips and knees at 90°
- Arms resting on the table

**Activity sheet A**







# Attention/fidgety

As occupational therapists, we become concerned when children’s attention levels impact on their ability to learn new skills. Children with attention difficulties may need help with their sitting posture, routine and structure. Behavioural strategies can also be used to help, such as the use of rewards. We have included basic strategies in this pack, but for more comprehensive advice, including sensory information, please refer to Lambeth’s attention difficulties resource pack, [w: www.lambethschoolservices.co.uk/Article/42222](http://www.lambethschoolservices.co.uk/Article/42222)

<b>Sitting posture</b>	<b>What have you tried? How frequently?</b>
Is the child slouching? Consider the postural control sheets. Consider putting a wedge shaped wobble cushion on the child’s chair. Consider good posture guideline.	
Consider sitting a child at the front of the class with their back to other children.	
Consider the use of movement breaks (see movement break sheet).	
<b>Consider how the environment is set up</b>	
Remove background noises, bulletin boards, displays and other sources of potential distracting visual and auditory stimuli.	
Ensure you use an appropriate sized table and chair	
<b>Consider how activities are set up</b>	
Remove all materials from the child’s work area that are not required for completion of the task they are doing.	
Check that the child has listened to your instructions, and understands what to do, by asking them to repeat the instructions back to you.	
Give the child several short tasks to complete, rather than one long task. If necessary, break down activities into smaller steps. You could use visuals to help prompt.	
<b>Motivating the child to attend</b>	
Provide the child with a specific time limit for completing each task. Use an egg timer as a visual reminder. You could use a reward chart. Write down what they need to do in simple words. Have them check it off as they complete tasks.	
Give lots of positive reinforcement when the child completes the task, as well as during the activity.	

## Movement breaks

Children with attention difficulties often benefit from movement breaks throughout the day. These need to be carried out regularly and often.

Activity	Explanation	Activity	Explanation
<b>Fiddle toy</b> 	Let the child hold an object such as a fiddle toy when they are expected to sit and listen (for example, carpet time, assembly).	<b>Table push-ups</b> 	Standing up and pushing down forcefully on the desk, as if you are trying to push the table into the floor. Count to 10.
<b>Chair push-ups</b> 	While sitting on hands with elbows slightly bent, try to push body up. Repeat eight times if you can.	<b>Pushing hands</b> 	Push hands tightly together. Count to 10.
<b>Wedge-shaped wobble cushion</b> 	Consider putting a wedge-shaped wobble cushion on the child's chair to allow the student to move while seated in a contained manner. See equipment list.	<b>Exercise resistance band</b> 	Tie a piece of exercise resistance band between the two front legs of the classroom chair. The child can then kick against this if feeling restless. See equipment list.

Which activities above have you tried and how often during the day?

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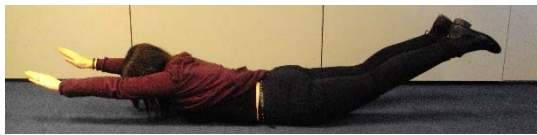

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## Activity sheet B

# Slouches/falls off chair/stool, leans against walls to prop (postural control)

Postural control is the strength and stability of your hips, trunk, shoulder and neck muscles. It helps to provide a stable base of support. Children with poor postural control may slump with a rounded posture when sitting. Poor posture and sitting position can make activities more challenging, from table top activities to PE.

<p><b>Strengthening tummy muscles</b> Record how often these are completed by ticking in this box. Remember: the more you do this the stronger you become!</p>		
<p><b>Silly bug</b></p>	<p>Lie on back, cross arms across chest, knees high in air, lift head and shoulders off mat. Hold position, the children could count aloud, for as long as they are comfortable. To make this easier try holding your knees.</p>	
<p><b>Ankle touch</b></p>	<p>Lie flat on the floor, keep tummy pulled in and touch ankles – switching from side to side.</p>	
<p><b>Strengthening back muscles</b> Record how often these are completed. Remember: the more you do this the stronger you become!</p>		
<p><b>Superman</b></p>	<p>Lie on tummy. Lift up arms and legs. Imagine you're flying</p>	
<p><b>Bench pull</b></p>	<p>Lie flat on your tummy, holding the bench with both hands to pull yourself along.</p>	

### Strengthening muscles to help us turn

Record how often these are completed by ticking in this box.  
Remember the more you do this the stronger you become!

#### Pass the parcel

In pairs, sit cross-legged with backs together. Hold the parcel with two hands and twist to the side to pass the parcel to each other.



#### Rollin 'game

Roll to collect puzzle pieces etc, using your heads and shoulders to lead to roll your body. Then lie on stomach to complete puzzle/game.

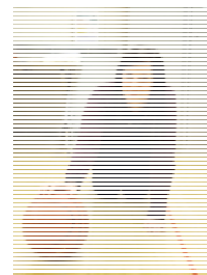


### Strengthening muscles in our hips and shoulders

Record how often these are completed.  
Remember: the more you do this the stronger you become!

#### Ball push

In pairs, on hands and knees, roll a ball to each other. Use alternate hands.



#### Drawing in high kneeling

In high kneeling, reach and stretch to draw different pictures.



### General strengthening activities

- Climbing frames, trim trails, slides and swings playground equipment.
- Helping to set up for PE, moving mats, benches and equipment.
- Carrying books, a box or running errands for the teacher.

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## Activity sheet C

# PE skills


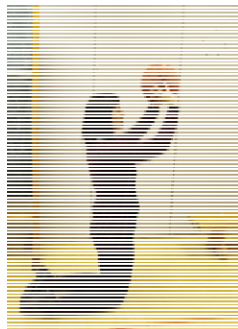
When working on these activities ensure it is at the 'just right' challenge for the child. Not too easy and not too hard.

When teaching PE activities to children with coordination difficulties, it is important to remember the following:

- Always demonstrate the activity next to the child.
- Talk aloud as you demonstrate to describe what you are doing.
- You may need to break the activity down into smaller steps.
- Ask the child to copy you.
- You may need to put them into the starting position for the activity at first, but also let them practice this step themselves.

Some children can appear fearful of movement. They may move slowly or avoid activities where they have to climb or tip their heads back. Try the balancing and postural activities with them. If you have carried these activities out regularly and they still appear anxious about movement please contact the occupational therapy department to discuss. They may benefit from a referral to Occupational Therapy.

Balance and postural control is important for all PE activities.

<b>Balancing when still</b>		
Record how often these are completed by ticking in this box. Remember: the more you do this the stronger you become!		
<b>Moving statues</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Move or dance, when the signal is given, freeze and stay as still as a statue.</li> </ul>	
<b>Standing on one leg</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It's easier if you look ahead and stare at a spot on the wall.</li> <li>• It is easier if you hold your arms outstretched to help.</li> <li>• See if you can increase the time.</li> </ul>	
<b>Catching/rolling a ball in high kneeling</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Throw and catch a ball together in high kneeling.</li> </ul>	



## Balancing while moving

Record how often these are completed by ticking in this box.

Remember: the more you do this the stronger you become!

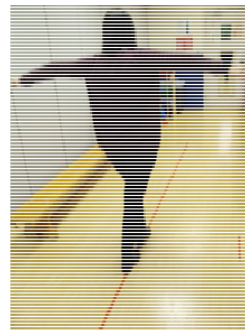
### Stepping stones

- Use pieces of paper as 'stones' to step on.
- Progress from large pieces of paper placed closely together to smaller pieces, placed further apart.
- You can buy curved stepping stones that challenge your balance further.



### Rope bridge

- Mark a line on the floor.
- Walk along the line pretending it is a rope bridge, try not to fall into the river.



### Obstacle Course

- Use hoops, cones, lines on the floor, etc to make an obstacle course to practice your balancing skills (help set it up)

### General balance activities

- Playing on climbing frames
- On the park equipment
- Trim trails

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## Activity sheet D

# Ball skills

Ball skills are important for a number of PE, play time and team games. Try the following activities to develop these skills (these activities are in order of difficulty).

Activity	Record how often these are completed by ticking in this box. Remember: the more you do this the stronger you become.
Burst bubbles by clapping hands together.	
Catching scarves in the air.	
Hit balloons in the air, with either your hand or with a bat or racket.	
Roll a ball back and forth to the child while sitting on the floor.	
Roll a ball to knock down homemade skittles, for example plastic bottles filled with dirt, sand or water.	
Bounce a ball on the ground with two hands and catch it.	
Throw a ball in the air and catch it as it comes back down.	
Throw and catch a ball with a partner. You can vary the distance and ball size.	
Throw a ball against a wall, let it bounce and catch it.	
Throw a ball to a target, this could be on the floor or on a wall.	

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Remember GOOD posture

- Feet flat on the floor
- Bottom at the back of the chair
- Hips and knees at 90°
- Arms resting on the table

## Activity sheet E

# Dressing

Dressing skills can be completed at home and at school to give the child lots of practice.

- Give you and the child time when practising dressing and undressing.
- Choose easy clothing for the child to practice with. Larger sizes are usually easier than smaller. Try big buttons and/or wider button holes. Labels or pictures on clothing may help them learn back and front.
- Start with undressing, as this is easier than dressing
- Establish a routine, for example pants first, then t-shirt, then socks; and follow this, the same way each time. This helps with learning because it allows the child to predict the steps.
- Lay the clothes out in the order they are put on (the same way each time). For example, lay jumpers out face down with the bottom part nearest to the child and the neck furthest away.
- Talk the child through the order in which clothes are put on and taken off. For example 'Now I am putting your right foot in, now I'm putting your left leg in'.
- Let the child complete as many of the steps involved in dressing as they can. Please see the information below on "Backwards chaining".
- Dressing in front of a mirror helps some children organise themselves while they are getting dressed, for example to see if their sweatshirt is pulled down at the back.
- If a child continues to struggle with dressing, consider adapting clothing to help the child cope, for example shoes with Velcro®, Velcro® on top buttons of shirts, elastic on shirt cuffs, elastic laces, toggles on coats or elastic waistbands.

Some children can be sensitive to touch sensations. They may dislike the feel of certain fabrics on their skin or dislike the light touch of adults when they are helping them to get dressed. Some children can be helped by cutting out labels or avoiding itchy fabrics. If touch sensitivities are affecting many aspects of dressing please contact the OT department for advice, it may be that the child would benefit from a referral to our service.

'Backward chaining' is a useful method that gives some children a sense of achievement when dressing. The idea is that the child completes the last part of the dressing task, so that they get the reward of completing the task. As their skills develop they can carry out more and more of the task until they can do it all.

- Place the sock on the child's foot and encourage them to pull the sock up their leg.
- Next, let the child pull the sock over their heel and up their leg.
- Lastly, let the child pull the sock over their foot and heel and up their leg independently.

Which strategies above have you tried and how often?

## Activity sheet F

# Using cutlery



Remember GOOD posture




- Feet flat on the floor
- Bottom at the back of the chair
- Hips and knees at 90°
- Arms resting on the table



Things to consider:

- Have the right tools for the job. Make sure the cutlery is the correct size for the child. Child-sized or cutlery with wider handles is easier to hold and use. Junior Caring Cutlery (available from online retailers) has shaped handles that promote appropriate hand placement.
- Sometimes children are able to learn how to use a knife and fork in a quiet room but when they get to the lunch hall they feel overwhelmed by all the noise, movement and smells. If you notice that the child appears to be struggling only when in the lunch hall think about how you might help to make lunch time more organised for them. Could they eat at quieter times or in a quieter area of the hall?

Some children struggle with feeding as they dislike the texture of food. They may have a highly restricted diet. They may also be worried about the food on their hands. If these difficulties continue to upset the child do contact us to discuss.

When practicing cutlery skills, it is best to learn in a quiet area away from distraction. Use play dough to make pretend food, or use soft foods such as bananas to practice the steps below:

Steps to using a knife and fork:		Tick when achieved
Practice holding a knife and fork. Their hands should be pointing down towards the plate.		
While holding the pretend food in one hand, practice stabbing it with a fork with the other hand.		
While holding the pretend food in one hand, practice sawing it with a knife in the other hand.		

Steps to using a knife and fork, continued		Tick when achieved
Practice using a knife and fork together. You may wish to chant the movements with the child. You may need to place your hands over theirs to help them learn.		
Practice turning the fork over to scoop pretend food onto it using the knife.		

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## Activity sheet G



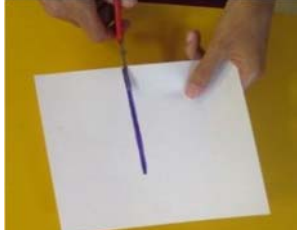
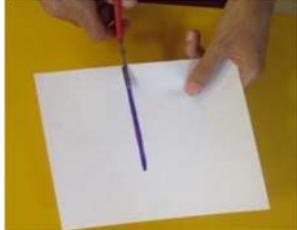



# Scissor skills



Remember GOOD posture

- Feet flat on the floor
- Bottom at the back of the chair
- Hips and knees at 90°
- Arms resting on the table

Cutting relies on the development of many skills, including hand strength and using both hands together. We learn to cut in the following sequence: cutting straight lines >> cutting around corners >> cutting circles >> cutting complex shapes/curved lines.

Steps of using scissors		Tick when achieved
1. Practice holding scissors: your thumb should be in the top loop of the scissors. You can place a small sticker on the top of the child's thumb, to provide a visual cue to remind them that their thumb should be on top.		
2. Learning how to snip: cut straws, cut paper fringes, cut play dough		
3. Learning to cut across the page: start with no line and progress to cutting along a short, thick straight line.		
4. Learning to cut along a longer, thinner straight line.		
5. Learning to cut around a corner: such as a right angle or a square. Right-handed children should cut in an anti-clockwise direction and left-handed children should cut in a clockwise direction.		
6. Learning to cut around curved lines and progressing on to circles. Right-handed children should cut in an anti-clockwise direction and left-handed children should cut in a clockwise direction.		
7. Learning to cut around complex shapes.		

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## Activity sheet H

# Handwriting



Remember GOOD posture

- Feet flat on the floor
- Bottom at the back of the chair
- Hips and knees at 90°
- Arms resting on the table

When working on handwriting, you need to make sure that all staff are following consistent and best practice in the classroom. We would recommend that all children are taught and practice handwriting for twenty minutes, two to three times per week.

Please refer to national curriculum guidelines to make sure that you are teaching skills needed for each year group.

Some children in early years of school are not ready to start handwriting, as they are not at that developmental level yet. Do consider the strategies outlined in the occupational therapy child development pack: [www.evelinalondon.nhs.uk/resources/patient-information/occupational-therapy-child-development-pack.pdf](http://www.evelinalondon.nhs.uk/resources/patient-information/occupational-therapy-child-development-pack.pdf)

When exploring handwriting options for your school, make sure you have a consensus on the script of handwriting you wish to use, for example, use of print and/or cursive writing. Make sure that all teachers within the school are using the same script and directional language.

### **Suggested teaching guidelines for handwriting**

Pen grip – focus on working towards a comfortable and working pencil grip. Only look to change a pencil/pen grip if it appears to have an impact on handwriting.

It is helpful to have a warm up before practicing handwriting, there are lots of ideas on the internet. Alternatively use the shoulder, arm and hand exercises in the attention section of this pack.

Main body – teaching letter formation:

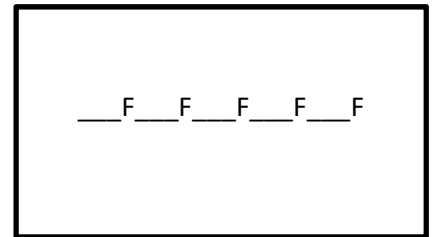
- Teach one letter at a time. Move onto the next letter once the child has mastered the letter being taught.
- Teach the letters in shape blocks, eg stick letters (i, l, t, j), anti-clockwise letters (o, a, c, d, g, q, s, e, u, f, y), clockwise letters (m, n, r, h, b, p), and diagonal letters (k, v, w, x, z)
- Emphasise the starting points for letters and the correct direction for lines. Children often look as though they have written the letter correctly, however they may have used segmented lines to get to that outcome. You can use green and red dots to prompt a starting and finish point.
- Make sure everyone uses the same language for each letter to describe the formation, for example 'start at the top', 'bump on the line'. This is called directional language.
- Teach the letter by demonstration on a board. Use directional language as you demonstrate. Draw the letter between two lines to allow for differentiation of size and to show placement of descenders and ascenders.
- Instruct the child to copy you, by using their pencils in the air. Encourage the child to use directional language while they make the shape.
- Some children will now be able to replicate this formation straight onto paper with two lines for them to draw the letters between.
- Tape a copy of the alphabet to the desk as a visual prompt

Some children who continue to struggle may benefit from the following recommendations to support them further:

- Consider producing letter formations in a range of different materials (for example, sand, shaving foam), make sure directional language and formation lines remain consistent.
- Using a small blackboard and piece of chalk get the child to write the letter you are teaching - this will work on pen grip and will provide movement feedback.
- Ask the child to use a small wet sponge to rub over the letter's line marks, following the formation.
- Ask the child to use a small dry cloth to go over the wet line marks, again following the correct formation.
- Remember to use directional language throughout this process.
- You may wish to sit next to the child and carry out the activity alongside them. Remember to use your left hand if they are left handed and right if right handed.

### For left-handed children

- The left-handed child often finds it easier to hold the pencil 2.5-3.5 cm from the tip of the pencil (further up the shaft of the pencil than a right-handed child).
- Left-handed children benefit from having demonstration letters placed at intervals across the lines in their handwriting books. They are less likely to obscure the examples with their writing hand.
- The paper should be positioned to the left of the child's midline (centre of their body) and should be slanted so the left side is parallel to the child's forearm as the child writes across the line. Many children see their writing better if the page is slanted to as much as 45°.



### Pencil pressure

- To reduce pressure: try writing on different surfaces that rip easily, this will encourage students to use less pressure. Try material such as Play-Doh®, tin foil or tissue backed onto cardboard.
- To increase pressure: use textures that require increased pressure to make writing visible, such as writing on ribbed cardboard, sandpaper, or using a pencil with softer lead.
- Try scribbling with varied pressure so that students can learn to 'feel' the difference.

### Touch typing

For some children who really struggle with handwriting, and have done for a long time, it is important to develop touch typing.

Try the following:

- There are many online resources and games aimed specifically at children that teach touch typing. Remember to monitor the child playing the games, as they may fall in to bad habits of typing with single fingers. Before the child moves onto the fun game, make sure they complete the practice section.
- It may also be useful to consider making a referral to the CENMAC service. This is a support service offering assessments, reviews and loan of equipment to help students with a disability access the curriculum using assistive technology. To make a referral see, [w: www.cenmac.com/about/refer-a-pupil/](http://www.cenmac.com/about/refer-a-pupil/)

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# Supplementary referral form

Children who are struggling with some everyday activities, but who do not meet the criteria listed on page 2 can still be referred to Occupational Therapy, provided you have implemented the advice from this pack for at least three months before making a referral. We ask that you record the child's progress throughout the pack and include this with your referral.

Please attach this form to a completed community services referral form. You can find it at, [w: www.evelinalondon.nhs.uk/community-occupational-therapy](http://www.evelinalondon.nhs.uk/community-occupational-therapy)

We have followed the resource pack for ..... months. We would now like to make a referral to occupational therapy.

..... continues to struggle with the following everyday activities:

.....

.....

.....

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.....

Please include the completed sheets from this pack and any other evidence you have used to support the child with their difficulties. **Note:** These **must** be included for a referral to be considered.

Completed by ..... Duration of input .....

## Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about the school resource pack, please contact the occupational therapy team at the Mary Sheridan Centre (Lambeth) or Sunshine House (Southwark), [t: 020 3049 8181](tel:02030498181), Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm. This pack is not to be reproduced without the consent of the occupational therapy service manager for the Children's Community Occupational Therapy Department, Guy's and St Thomas' Hospital.

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