

## ***Home Schooling a Child with Down Syndrome:***

# **Handwriting Resources**

*Before choosing resources,  
know where your child is in his  
fine motor skill development.  
Then you will know what skills  
he needs to work on next and  
be better able to choose the  
resources you need.*

*This pamphlet includes ideas of what  
to do while you are waiting for fine  
motor muscles to develop. It also gives  
suggestions for teaching handwriting.*

### **What to Look for in a Handwriting Program:**

- ∞ Simple pages that are not cluttered
- ∞ Many letters are one stroke (manuscript letters can be very confusing as to what side to place the ball and stick.)
- ∞ Many families want to use a handwriting font that is the same or similar to that of the other family members.

Many children with Down Syndrome are able to learn to write in time. It is important to be consistent, teach carefully, and establish good habits from the beginning. Equally important is establishing a good attitude toward handwriting time. Make it a fun time to be together.

**Woodbine House  
Special Needs Collection  
6510 Bells Mill Road  
Bethesda, MD 20817  
(800) 843-7323**

- ❖ **Teaching Reading to Children with Down Syndrome** by Patricia Logan Oelwein  
This resource also gives ideas for handwriting.
- ❖ **The Sensible Pencil** by Linda C. Becht  
EBSCO Curriculum Materials  
1-800-633-8623  
This program was developed for children with Down Syndrome. Since this program is expensive, you might try it only if your child has extreme difficulties and other handwriting programs are not working.

**Handwriting Without Tears  
Jan Z. Olsen, OTR  
8802 Quiet Stream Ct.  
Potomac, MD 20854  
301-983-8409  
Web: [www.hwtears.com](http://www.hwtears.com)**

- ❖ **Handwriting Without Tears: Letters and Numbers for Me (kindergarten)**  
Comes with a teacher's guide (one stroke letters and very inexpensive to use)

**D'Nealian Handwriting**  
*See your local teacher-supply store*

### **Preschool Readiness Activities**

Any preschool or kindergarten curriculum usually lists these types of activities. Here are a few to get you started. Tracing can be done with the pointer finger until your child can hold a pencil:

- ∞ Play dough (pinch, squeeze, roll snakes, pound, poke, etc.)
- ∞ Forming circles, vertical and horizontal lines with the following:
  - finger paint
  - crayons or colored markers
  - shaving cream or pudding on a tray
- ∞ Using the "pincher grip" (pointer finger and thumb) to pick up small objects such as beans and place them into the opening of a bottle.
- ∞ Draw lines (waves, diagonals, and curves) or simple shapes with a highlighter marker for your child to trace.
- ∞ Use your computer to make thick dotted lines for him to track going left to right and top to bottom. Place a beginning and ending clip art picture to make it interesting.

## Hints for Teaching Handwriting

1. Remember that the main objective is legible handwriting. Some fonts may have little curves at the end of the letter (see letter on right below). If your child does not do this little curve, do not bother to try to get him to do it. Likewise, do not be too concerned about slant as long as there are no extremes. If your program has slanted letters but your child makes them straight. It does not matter because the main objective is legibility.

*n*            *n*

2. Give plenty of praise.
3. Practice handwriting for only about 5 minutes at a sitting. As your child gains confidence and is able to do more writing, increase to no more than 10 minutes of actual writing time.
4. Teach proper pencil hold and posture from the beginning.
5. Use regular size pencils unless an occupational therapist says your child needs something else.
6. Provide large models of a letter your child is learning. You might use sentence strips you can purchase at teacher supply stores to write models to finger-trace. Write the letters with a thick black marker with about two-inches of space between the letters. Use red and blue to show letters with multiple strokes. Place a starting dot in green for each letter. Use a thin black marker to darken the top and bottom handwriting lines if needed. Post these where your child will write.
7. Always model before your child writes. Talk about what you are doing and say it the same way each time. Your child may need to finger-trace before trying it on his own (copying beside the model).

8. Use different colors of chalk or markers to show multi-stroke letters.
9. Write letters with a highlighter marker for him to trace. (If tracing on black he cannot see his line) Allow your child to do lots of tracing before directing him to copy letters.
10. Use hand-over-hand assistance to help your child have success if necessary.
11. Provide practice tracing the letter without handwriting lines until he seems to know the basic strokes. Then move to handwriting lines to help him work on proportions.
12. Put a greater focus on the lowercase letters. These are used more often in writing than the uppercase letters.
13. Teach your child about the handwriting lines. Pat Oelwein's book gives a good idea that will be fun. The Wilson reading program also has a good idea.
14. Use a green marker and place beginning dots where your child is to begin the letter.
15. If your child does not see his mistake, you make a larger letter and exaggerate the mistake. Then make another letter and form it correctly. Tell your child to place a sticker or circle the one that is a "happy" letter because it was formed correctly.
16. Never just give your child handwriting to practice and walk away. If he makes a whole row of letters incorrectly, he is learning bad habits that once established will be hard to correct.
17. It is better to make three letters correctly and end with a child that is still smiling than it is to write a whole page of letters and end with a child that hates writing time.
18. When marking your child's handwriting, emphasize what is correct. Put a smile or get the very small stickers and place one by every letter that has improved.
19. Criteria: Do not work on everything at once. In the beginning work on forming the letter

correctly, then work on how it is placed on the handwriting lines. Point out that most lowercase letters begin on the mid-line (or whatever you choose to call this line). After letter formation is down pat, work on getting your child to "sit" the letters on the bottom line so that they are not floating. This helps tremendously with neatness. Later in life your child will have only one line to write on for forms he may need to fill out for work.

20. Before writing letters on paper, use different fun ways to give practice of the letter:
  - ∞ Use gross motor movements and trace the letters on a chalkboard or whiteboard. It may also be helpful to write them with a finger in the air, on the bumpy surface of a rug, or on a table.
  - ∞ If your child is not tactile defensive, trace with a finger in shaving cream, finger paints, pudding, a box of sand, or corn meal.
  - ∞ Trace with a blunt pencil in a thin amount of clay spread out on a tray.
  - ∞ Allow your child to use colored markers, crayons, or colored chalk to write instead of a pencil.

Note: Bob Jones University Press uses a "PreCursive" handwriting that also uses one stroke letters. However they do not have a separate handwriting workbook on the kindergarten level. If your other family members use this handwriting style use the above ideas for practice and then use a writing tablet with the appropriate size lines when he is ready for practice.

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