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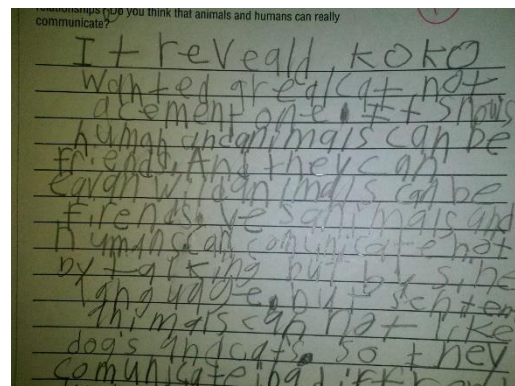
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Why do some children struggle to write neatly?

Causes of poor handwriting

- Poor visual perceptual skills
- Poor muscle tone
- Poor postural control
- Poor fine eye-hand coordination
- Poor hand function
- Poor motor planning
- Poor sensory integration
- Poor visio-motor integration
- Poor concentration
- ADHD/ADD
- Cognitive and psychological factors
- Dysgraphia: this is a neurological disorder resulting in problematic handwriting. This disorder sometimes accompanies ADHD, Asperger's, learning disabilities, trauma and physical disabilities. Criteria for diagnosis include the absence of intellectual impairment and the ability to read according to your age level.



What will help?

First it is important to find the cause of the poor handwriting. If it is one of the many causes listed above then yes, therapy will help.

Take your child to an occupational therapist to determine the underlying cause of the poor handwriting. Addressing the cause/causes will improve the handwriting. Weekly therapy may be necessary or a home program could be followed.

Some children struggle a lot with poor handwriting and are diagnosed with dysgraphia.

Causes of dysgraphia

- Visual-spatial difficulties
- Language processing difficulties
- The causes listed under 'poor handwriting' may also apply here

Signs of dysgraphia

- Mixing upper and lower case
- Awkward positioning of the body while writing
- Inconsistent shape and size of letters/numbers
- Struggles to form letters/numbers
- Unfinished letters
- Talks to self while writing

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- Increased/decreased copying speed
- A lot of spelling errors
- Poor use of lines and spacing
- Experiences stress when having to write (e.g. crying)
- Pain in hand/arm when writing
- Clumsy pencil grip
- Sometimes mixes cursive and print writing



Types of dysgraphia

- **Dyslexic dysgraphia**
Spontaneous writing is poor, copying is good and spelling is bad. This diagnosis doesn't mean that your child is dyslexic as well.
- **Motor dysgraphia**
This is usually due to poor fine eye-hand coordination/motor incoordination/dexterity/muscle-tone. The child cannot sustain writing for long periods of time and often writes with a slant.
- **Spatial dysgraphia**
These kids often struggle to stay inside the lines as well as with spacing of the letters and words.
- **Phonological dysgraphia**
These kids struggle to write non-words, unknown words and phonetically irregular words are problematic.
- **Lexical dysgraphia (rare in kids)**
Kids will struggle to write words that are phonetically irregular, especially in English as spelling is not always phonetically.

Will therapy help?

If the therapist suspects dysgraphia your child needs to be referred to a neurologist for diagnosis.

Therapy may/or may not be of value as the underlying causes need to be investigated when dysgraphia is diagnosed.

Classroom tips

- It doesn't help to let a child with dysgraphia repeat untidy work or illegible writing. Practising won't improve his handwriting.
- Don't always judge the child or harp on his untidy handwriting. This will affect the child's attitude towards school and may cause emotional stress and can lead to a negative self-image and depression.
- The best is to offer alternatives to writing e.g. using a tablet/computer when completing homework or completing exams/tests orally
- It sometimes helps to supply the child with a slant board as it positions the body ergonomically correctly
- Allow the child more time to copy work/complete writing tasks
- Let the child experiment with different pens/pencils (thickness/resistance on the paper) – all of us prefer a different kind of pen and this may also make it easier for the child
- Practise writing letters in the sand/salt/in the air to practise gross motor shaping of the letters
- Let the child choose if he wants to write print or cursive
- Decrease the amount of work that the child has to copy and rather focus on important writing tasks – have the copied work ready for the child



References

www.ncl.org/types-learning-disabilities/dysgraphia/what-is-dysgraphia

www.handwriting-solutions.com/dysgraphia.asp

www.occupationaltherapychildren.com.au/information/dysgraphia-handwriting-difficulties