Vermont Family Network

facts

The ultimate goal is to help students with dysgraphia write without conscious effort using supports in school and at home.

What to Do When Children Have Trouble with Writing

A child who has difficulty writing may become very frustrated; he may have meltdowns, possibly spending time in the principal's office. A child with the neurological disorder dysgraphia may have difficulty with the physical aspects of handwriting, spelling, or putting thoughts on paper.

Signs of dysgraphia include: difficulty writing within the margins, inconsistent spacing between words, and letter reversals. Challenges in writing may affect your child's attitude in class and his self-esteem.

What parents can do
Children with learning disabilities often need extra support at home.

- Be patient and encourage your child in order to avoid a meltdown.
- As needed, write as your child dictates information to help reduce the frustration of writing.
- Help organize your child's writing by discussing his topic. Thinking out loud will help him plan and organize thoughts before writing. Take notes while brainstorming.
- Encourage your child to use word processing and/or speech-to-print technology.
- Make sure directions are clear.
- Discuss accommodations with your child's teacher.

Help in school
Children with writing difficulty need accommodations, changes in assignments and expectations, and direct instruction. The following are examples to help assist your child in school.

Accommodations for changing the demands of writing rate
Allow more time for written tasks including note taking, copying, and tests. Allow more time for students by beginning assignments early. Encourage keyboarding skills to increase speed and legibility of written work.

Adjusting the volume of work

- Instead of writing a complete set of notes, provide a partially-completed outline so the student can fill in details under major headings, or provide details and have to student provide the headings.
- Enable the student to dictate to another individual (a scribe).
- Remove neatness and/or spelling as a grading criterion for some assignments giving consideration to the purpose.

Consider changing the complexity of work the child must complete

- Provide a writing binder that includes models for forming letters and templates for written formats.
- Break writing into stages and use the computer to revise assignments. Print out rough drafts in order to show the difference with and without revisions.
- Use a spell checker.

Modify or change assignments or expectations to meet a student's needs

- Reduce the amount of copying on assignments and tests. Let the student answer in phrases or words.
- Decrease the length of written assignments; stress quality over quantity.
- Use different grading procedures for written assignments, on some grammar may not count, on others spelling may not count.
- Develop cooperative writing projects.
- Work on structuring assignments and due dates with students and parents.
- Offer an alternative project, such as an oral report or visual project.
- Use a rubric or grid to guide expectations.
- Provide models for paragraph and essay formats.

Use different writing tools to accommodate the physical aspects of writing

- Allow students to use graph paper for math, or to turn lined paper sideways to help with lining up columns of numbers.
- Allow students to use a writing utensil that is most comfortable for them, such as mechanical pencils or a pencil grip.
- Enable the child to use word processing. Some keyboarding programs address the needs of students with learning disabilities by teaching the keys alphabetically or using a sensory approach.
- Consider using speech recognition software, if the student is willing to invest the time to learn it.

Children with dysgraphia benefit from direct instruction or remediation

- Build handwriting instruction into the student's schedule.
- Provide occupational therapy or other special education services based on the child's individual needs.
- Teach alternative handwriting methods.

When a student is able to write automatically, he can think and develop ideas effortlessly, solve problems, and develop an individual writing style. Students with dysgraphia experience quite a struggle and benefit from affirmation of their hard work. With appropriate help, a child will learn to write more easily and feel better about being in school.

Resources

Kurzweil Education Systems
Literacy support software.
800-894-5374

National Center for Learning Disabilities
Information on dysgraphia.
212-545-7510

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