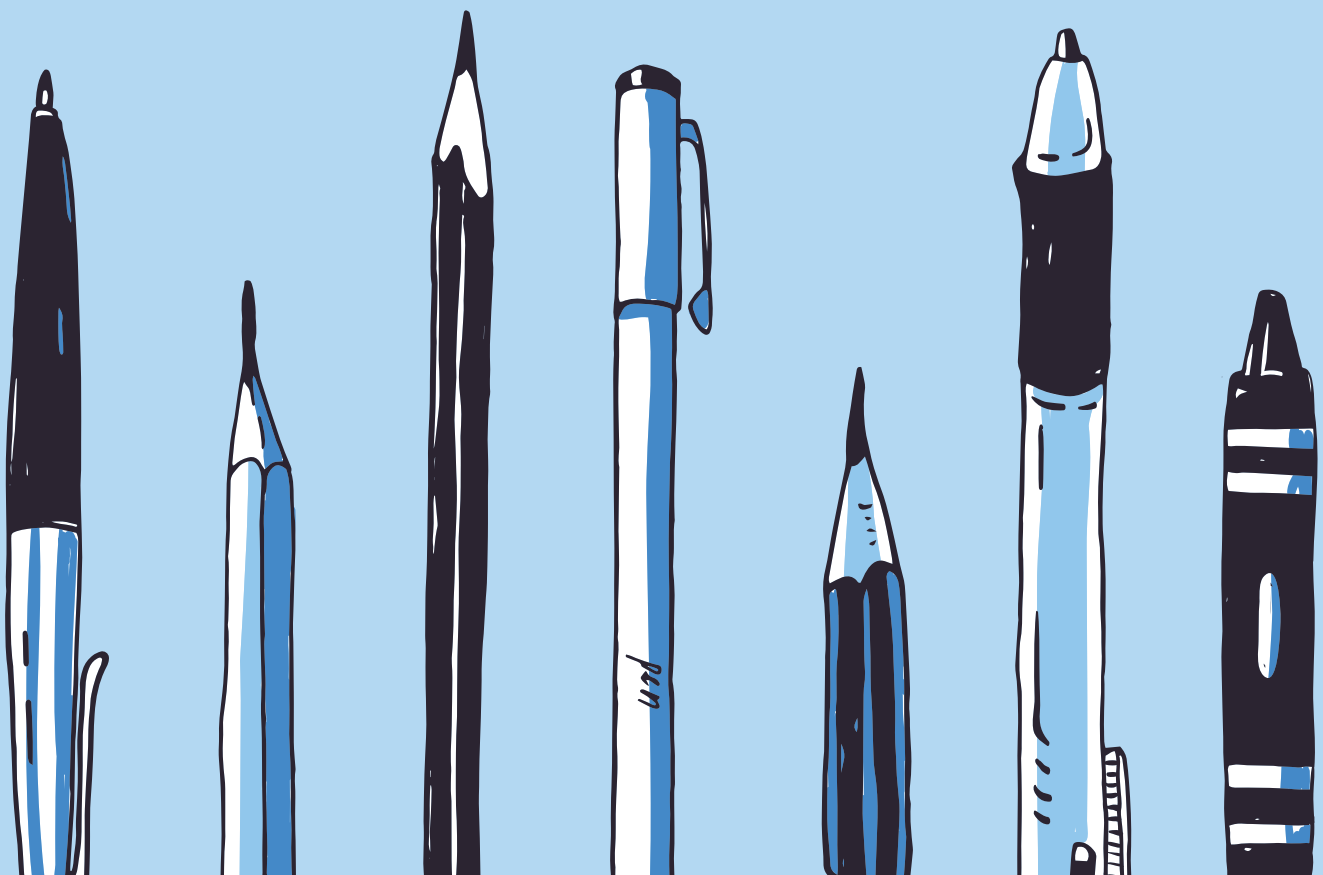


# Foundations of Handwriting

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CHICAGO **OCCUPATIONAL** THERAPY

# Welcome to Foundations of Handwriting

by:

**CHICAGO**  
**OCCUPATIONAL**  
**THERAPY**

with



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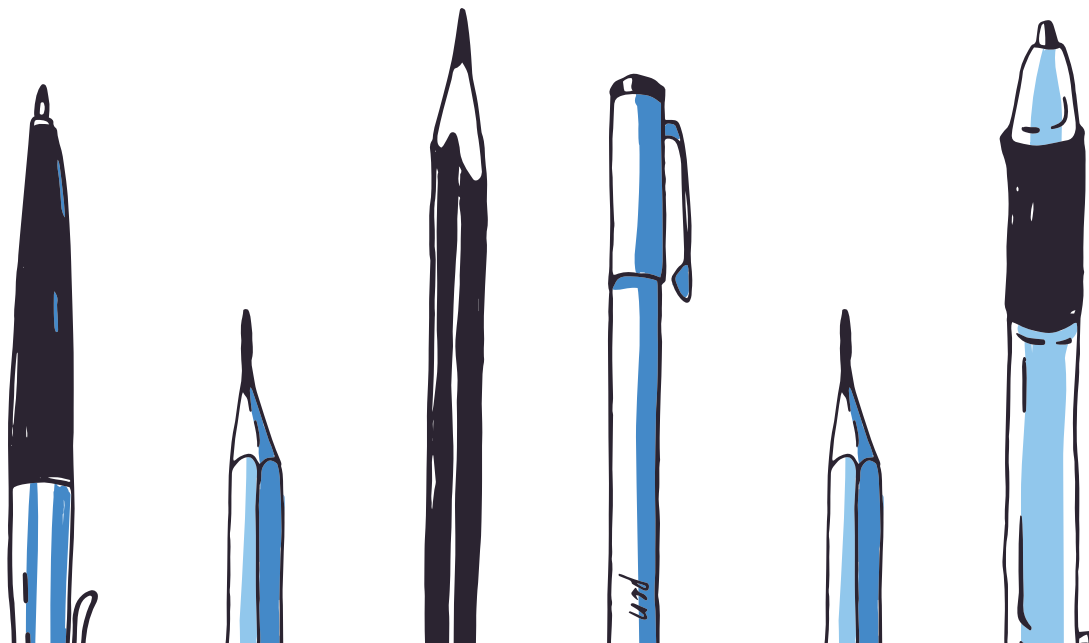
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# Letter to Users

Dear Foundations of Handwriting User,

Welcome to the Foundations of Handwriting program, I'm so happy you chose this program! If your child is struggling with handwriting or you're looking for a new handwriting approach, then you've come to the right place. Whether you are a therapist, teacher, or parent, this program will guide your children to become successful in handwriting all while having fun and learning!

As a pediatric occupational therapist, one of my main focus areas is handwriting. In my years as a therapist, I have received countless evaluations for 'sloppy' handwriting. Although handwriting was the initial concern, the evaluation often reveals that foundational skills that support handwriting are not yet developed. Directly resulting from underdeveloped skills, the child often exhibits challenges with learning basic handwriting and academic skills.

To learn handwriting with success, a child must first master the basics also known as foundational skills before they are introduced to academic concepts like writing letters. This is similar to a child learning to ride a bike, an individual cannot successfully learn to ride a bike without first crawling, walking, running, etc. So why would we expect a child to jump into writing the alphabet before they are developmentally ready?

This program was created to promote handwriting mastery through a child's development of foundational skills. To promote growth of foundational skills, this program provides an easy to use program for you to learn about and implement activities that target handwriting success.

Reading through the informational section of this booklet you will understand that handwriting is complex, but also uniquely seen as a basic academic concept. Schools are introducing letters earlier, but the children are not yet developmentally ready to take on this information. Which may later result in 'sloppy' handwriting, inattention to work or lessons, frustration, complete refusal to do work, and negative behaviors.

This program's purpose is to reach parents, teachers, caregivers, therapists, and anyone who is influential in a child's early learning. I hope Foundations of Handwriting brings you greater awareness and that you feel empowered to build your child(ren)'s foundational skills to be a handwriting master.

Sincerely,  
Shelly Andrews

# Introduction

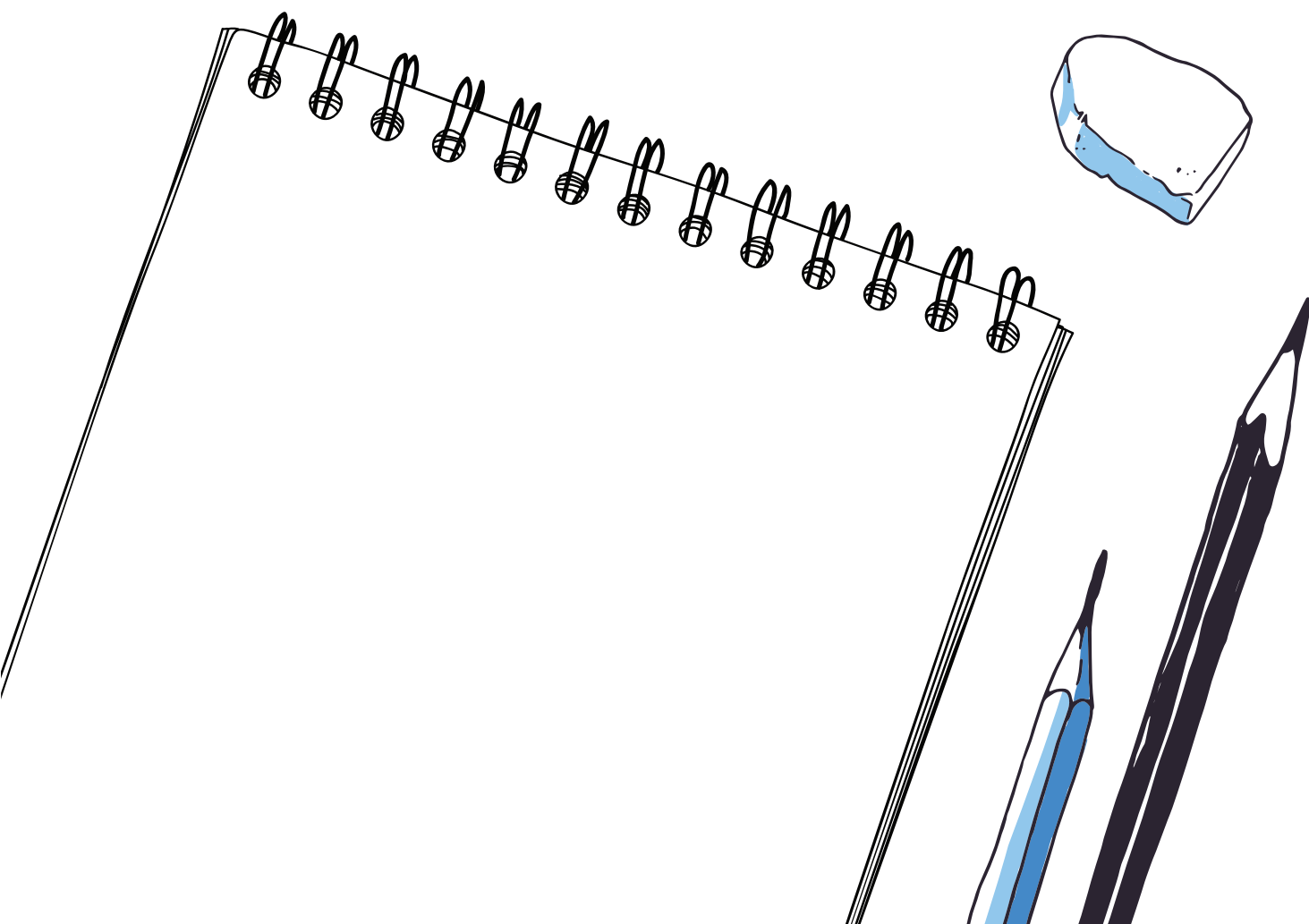
Handwriting is a fundamental, lifelong skill developed in the early elementary years. As one of the primary means for expressing learned information, handwriting skills are crucial for both short and long-term academic success. When handwriting is poor, it often affects a student's performance in the classroom. Children who struggle with handwriting often exert greater effort when completing tasks and assignments, thus decreasing their ability to fully attend to their teacher, keep up with their peers, and produce the same volume of work in a designated time.

The Foundations of Handwriting program was designed to target the foundational skills needed for handwriting. This program is intended to prepare children 2-5 years old with the foundations necessary for becoming efficient writers, and contains educational materials for teachers, parents, and therapists alike. It includes resources, activities, and a guided program targeted at skill progression and academic readiness. This program is intended to be used in various settings such as preschools, therapeutic schools, kindergarten handwriting lessons, and homeschooling. It can also be utilized by teachers who have preschool students struggling with pre-writing skills and by therapists who are treating children with developmental delays. Additionally, it can be used as a guide for families and educational settings for typically developing children to facilitate foundational skills that will set them up for future academic success.

Foundations of Handwriting focuses on foundational skill areas including visual-motor integration, visual perception, fine motor control, hand strength, core strength, bilateral coordination, sensory processing, and attention. These are all necessary foundational skills that affect a child's ability to attend to, comprehend, and produce successful handwriting. Later on, this resource will explore areas of development in greater depth (pages 20-21).

# Foundations of Handwriting Program Guide

The following pages (6-11) provide a detailed explanation of how to implement the Foundations of Handwriting Program with your child, student, or client.



# Foundations of Handwriting Program

Use the following age recommendations to determine which developmental program level is right for your child.

Within program levels, note which of our recommended activities are categorized as **foundational** or **handwriting** specific.

## PROGRAM LEVELS

### **Level A** *(1-2 years old)*

20 minutes of **foundational activities** each day.

### **Level B** *(3 years old)*

20 minutes of **foundational activities** each day.

### **Level C** *(4 years old)*

20 minutes of activities each day.  
At least 10 minutes of **foundational activities** and up to 10 minutes of **handwriting activities**.

### **Level D** *(5 years old)*

20 minutes of activities each day.  
At least 10 minutes of **foundational activities** and up to 10 minutes of **handwriting activities**.

### **Level E** *(6 years old)*

30 minutes of activities each day.  
At least 10 minutes of **foundational activities** and up to 20 minutes of **handwriting activities**.

### **Level F** *(7+ years old)*

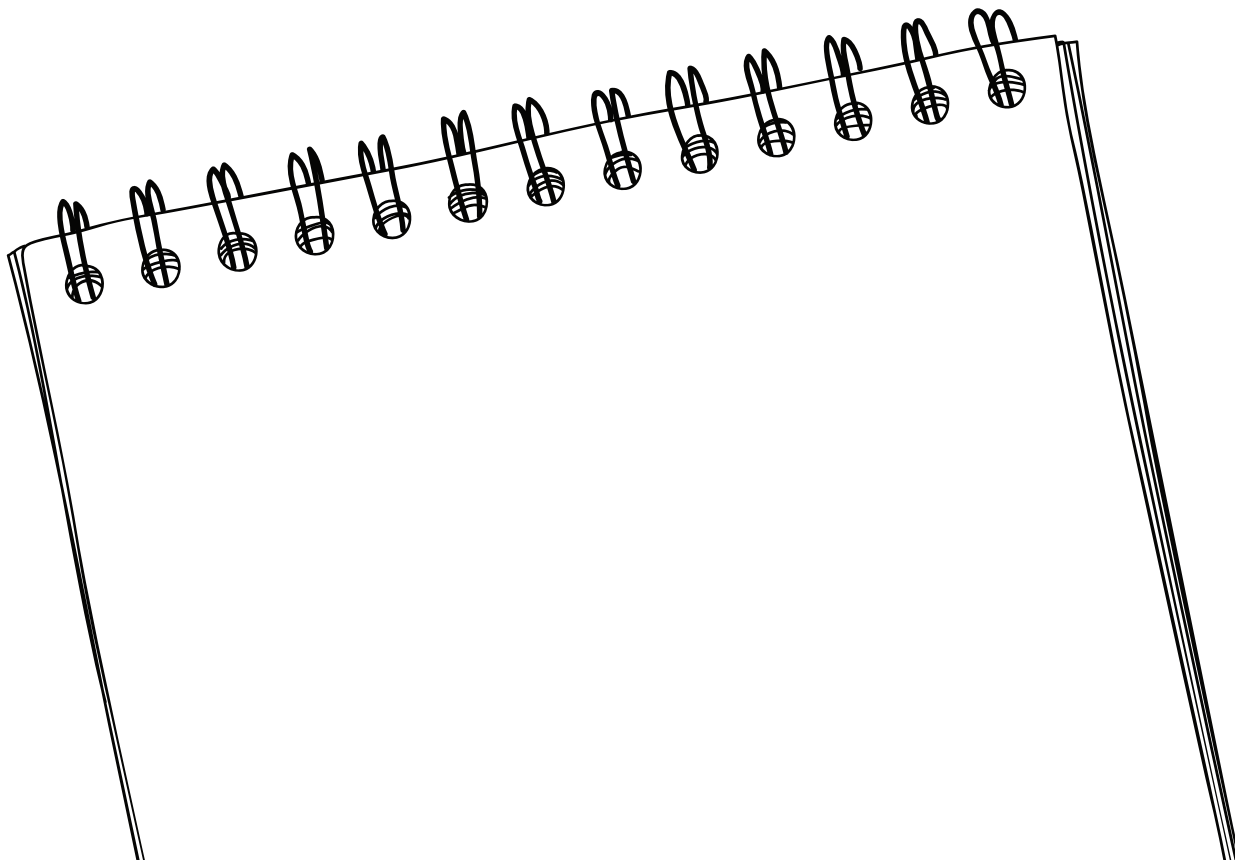
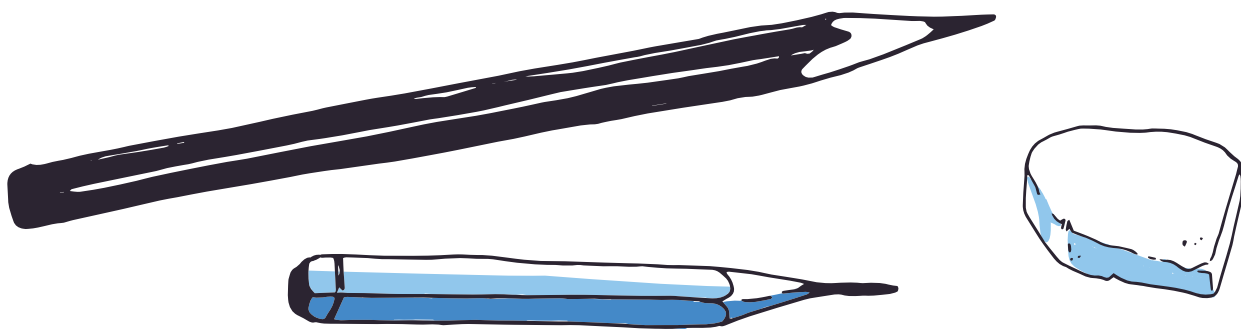
30 minutes of activities each day.  
At least 10 minutes of **foundational activities** and up to 20 minutes of **handwriting activities**.

You should **only** move onto a higher level of the program once your child has **fully mastered** all of the prior levels.

If you begin a more advanced level (Level B or above) and notice that your child is struggling, you should **go back to previous levels** to ensure that they have fully grasped all of the necessary skills.

Increase foundational skills as you see fit!

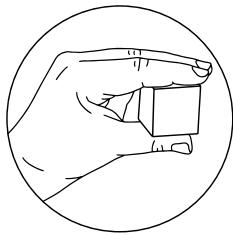
# Information & Helpful Strategies



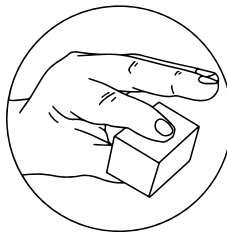


# Developmental Grasp Patterns

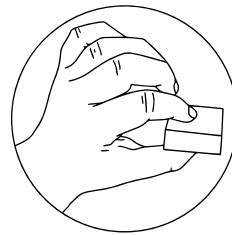
**Radial  
Digital Grasp**  
6 months



**Inferior  
Pincer Grasp**  
9 months



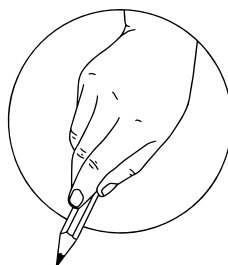
**Refined  
Pincer Grasp**  
12 months



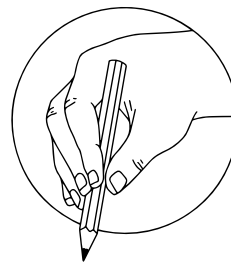
**Fisted (Palmar  
Supinate) Grasp**  
12 months



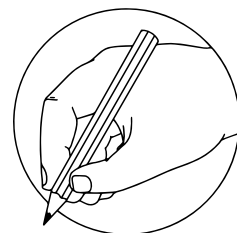
**Digital  
Pronate Grasp**  
2 years



**Static  
Tripod Grasp**  
3.5 years



**Dynamic  
Tripod Grasp**  
4.5 years



The above images are referenced throughout our Fine and Visual Motor Developmental Milestones chart on the following page. This chart serves as a comprehensive guide of milestones related to handwriting skills for children ages birth to 6 years, with age groups divided into 13 categories.

If you have concerns about your child meeting the milestones indicated in their appropriate age group, they may benefit from an occupational therapy evaluation.

# Fine and Visual Motor Developmental Milestones

## 3 MONTHS

- Involuntarily grasps objects with all fingers (2-3 mo)

## 6 MONTHS

- Accurately reaches towards object
- Grasps toy at middle of body, transfers toy between hands, and brings to mouth
- Plays with toys while sitting (5-10 mo)
- \*Uses a radial digital grasp on blocks (8 mo)

## 9 MONTHS

- Attempts to imitate scribble
- \*Uses an inferior pincer grasp to pick up small items
- Visually tracks with eyes horizontally, vertically, and in a circular motion (9-10 mo)

## 12 MONTHS

- Plays with toys at middle of body
- Points with index finger
- \*Uses a refined pincer grasp to pick up small items
- Scribbles on paper
- \*Holds writing utensil with a fist (palmar supinate) grasp (1-1.5 years)

## 1.5 YEARS

- Uses two hands during play
- Turns cardboard pages of book

## 2 YEARS

- Imitates vertical, horizontal and circular marks
- Completes 3-piece insert puzzle
- Holds and snips with scissors
- \*Uses a digital pronate grasp on a writing utensil (2-3 years)

## 2.5 YEARS

- Strings beads
- Cuts across a 6 inch piece of paper

## 3 YEARS

- Cuts on a straight line 6 inches long (3-3.5 years)
- Copies a vertical line, horizontal line and circle

# Development of Shape and Letter Recognition/Formation

When developing the skills to form shapes and letters, a child progresses through the following four stages of visual motor integration:

- Recognize
- Imitate
- Copy
- Form from memory

The following charts indicate developmental norms for the ages at which children should achieve each of the stages for common shapes and letters.

## Letters

	2-3 Years	3-4 Years	4-5 Years (Pre-K)	5-6 Years (K)
Uppercase: <b>ABC</b>			Imitate	Form from memory
Lowercase: <b>abc</b>			Recognize/ Imitate	Form from memory
Numbers: <b>123</b>			Recognize/ Imitate	Form from memory



# Common Handwriting Concerns and FAQs



This chart identifies common questions and concerns that an occupational therapist addresses. Additionally, it offers activity suggestions for how you can set your child up for success based on the developmental targets and skill areas in question.

If you notice other difficulties with attending to handwriting lessons that are not indicated on the chart, ask yourself the following questions and see the Regulation Strategies reference sheet on the following page for assistance.

## **SITTING POSITION:**

- Are there frequent positional adjustments/movement?

## **ATTENTION:**

- Is the task too challenging or too easy?
- Are there environmental distractions?

## **SIGNS THE CHILD NEEDS A MOVEMENT BREAK:**

- Is their body under alerted or hyper alerted?
- Have they been sitting for a long duration?

If you notice...	Then you should...
<b>Decreased hand stability on paper:</b> The child is not utilizing their non-dominant hand to stabilize the paper, causing the paper to wiggle under their writing utensil and decreasing precision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Work on bilateral coordination activities</li><li>• Educate yourself and your child about the importance of hand stability</li></ul>
<b>Decreased visual attention:</b> The child is only able to complete their work for short durations. They may appear to be avoiding work, looking around the room, or otherwise unable to focus on the task at hand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Decrease visual stimuli and duration of task demands then slowly increase</li><li>• Consider placing their work on a tilted or vertical surface.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Common methods of doing this is by utilizing a slant board, taping the worksheet on the wall, or working on an easel.</li></ul></li></ul>

# Meet the Team Who Established the Program

## **Shelly Andrews** *Foundations of Handwriting Creator*

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Shelly Andrews is an accomplished occupational therapist with expertise serving the pediatric population. Shelly received a Bachelor of Science in interdisciplinary health services with completed minors in psychology and holistic health care from Western Michigan University. After completing her undergraduate studies, Shelly continued her education at WMU to achieve a Master of Science in Occupational Therapy (MS, OTR/L) degree.

During her educational and professional years, Shelly has worked in a variety of home, school, and clinical settings, primarily specializing in outpatient pediatric care. She has provided services for children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), sensory processing disorder (SPD), trauma, and other conditions and diagnoses.

As the lead occupational therapist at Chicago Occupational Therapy, Shelly has been instrumental in developing programming and curriculum for patients as well as mentoring new graduates, students, and aspiring occupational therapists. Shelly consistently works to educate staff on client profiles, facility equipment, and best practices to set collective team standards for a cohesive high level of care.

Shelly enjoys empowering parents and caregivers through education about their child's needs and care plans. She loves being an occupational therapist because of the ability to see her patients reach levels of functional independence, develop a sense of meaning in daily occupations, and achieve their full potential.

## **Taylor Reckert** *Foundations of Handwriting Editor/Consultant*

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Taylor Reckert is an occupational therapist with wide-ranging experience working with the pediatric population. She attended Eastern Michigan University where she received both a Bachelor of Science degree in occupational therapy as well as a Master of Occupational Therapy (MOT, OTR/L) degree.

Throughout her educational and professional journey, Taylor has worked with children with a vast array of developmental delays and disorders including autism spectrum disorder (ASD), sensory processing disorder (SPD), executive functioning deficits, and more. She also holds an Early Intervention Certification, a credential that specifically focuses on working with children ages 0-3.

At Chicago Occupational Therapy, Taylor co-conducts a handwriting group for clients to improve their pre-writing and writing skills. She is also a senior therapist and experienced clinical supervisor for both fieldwork students and new graduates.

Taylor uses a client-centered philosophy in her therapy practice to ensure that clients are working towards and achieving personalized goals that are meaningful and purposeful to them as individuals. Taylor loves being an OT because of the opportunity to help people live to their fullest potential, become successful in their daily lives, and participate in the things that they both need and love to do!

# CHICAGO OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

