

## **[www.autismhelp.info](http://www.autismhelp.info)**

### **Handwriting difficulties and note taking**

*Brody is reluctant to write - he hates making mistakes that are permanent, but is more co-operative now that he uses a white board.*

#### **Points to note**

- Many children with autism have fine motor difficulties that it make it hard for them to write neatly. They may not have enough control in their hands to hold a pen properly.
- Some students are perfectionists who insist on always forming their letters perfectly. They may become so obsessed that they constantly erase their writing and start over, never completing an activity. Other students may be extremely slow writers, or they may write well at the beginning of an activity but quickly tire.
- Sometimes a child with autism will insist on writing all his letters in capitals.
- The student's handwriting may suffer if he is anxious about writing well or stressed by some other issue.
- The student may have difficulty taking notes from the blackboard, as this involves reading the words, keeping them in his memory momentarily, writing them down, often while listening to verbal instructions from a teacher! It is very difficult for a child with autism to attend to more than one stimulus at a time.
- It can be difficult for a child with autism to make the change to cursive writing after he has learned to print.
- Sometimes a child will be so self-conscious about his poor handwriting that he is too embarrassed to hand in his work.
- Some children with autism have great difficulty reading the handwriting of others.

#### **What you can do**

- The child may need to use paper with larger lines to keep his writing even and uniform.
- The child who insists on writing in capitals may have learnt to write this way prior to school entry and has become 'stuck'. It is up to the individual to decide whether to tackle this issue. There are many other ways of recording information.
- Some children will benefit from a reference close at hand. Keep a laminated alphabet card inside the child's folder cover or taped to his desk.
- Show the child how you handle mistakes when you are writing.
- Sometimes a child will write better if you tape his page to his desk so that he doesn't have to hold the page with his spare hand. Some children might just need a prompt to 'use your helping hand' to stop the page moving while they write.
- Sometimes a child writes better if his writing surface is raised to a 15-degree angle.

- While handwriting difficulties need to be addressed, consider alternative methods of recording such as using a laptop or mini tape recorder. These can be useful when the student needs to record a lot of information.
- Advise the student of how much he will need to write at the *beginning* of the lesson so that he knows what is expected of him.
- Assign a note taking buddy – have another student photocopy his notes to ensure the student with autism has a complete set. Provide a handout with a summary of key points
- A social story could help to teach the child that it is OK to make mistakes. See the page on [Social stories](#).
- Allow the student to type written work. Ask the student's parents if they can transcribe the work if the student is not a competent typist.