

# Stay @ Home OT Resource

Guide for parents providing Occupational Therapy  
input for children with specific needs at home



## Introduction

This guide was developed as a result of the Covid-19 Pandemic where many students were sent home from school. We understand how changes big or small for your children can impact on their behaviour and function.

In this guideline, we will aim to provide you with some tips and strategies which may help to settle your child during this time and also continue with improving on areas of their development.

All you will need is time, yourself and in some instances items commonly found within the home environment.

Remember that all children are different and are all in different stages of development; so not all areas in this resource will be applicable or appropriate. In saying that, it may just be a matter of trial and error. Most importantly do not to give up too early as changes in routine/function do not always happen overnight and may take a few days, weeks or even longer.

We hope that this will be a valuable resource for your family!

Please note that this is a guide only and if you have any questions relating to Occupational Therapy needs of your child, please contact your child's Occupational Therapist or the Redbridge Occupational Therapy team on 0300 300 1618 Option 1.

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## Scheduling

Changes in familiar activities can make us all feel anxious. Children can find these things particularly stressful. You can help by planning and preparing your child for daily routines and for them to understand what to expect.

Timetables are a simple way to let your child know what to expect, and when. You could use pictures, words or both. Below is an example and appendix C is a template schedule which can be printed and used. Additionally, if your child finds it hard to switch from a favourite activity, a timer might help. Set the time and let your child know the activity will be over when the timer rings. You can get a smartphone timer app or use a stopwatch or kitchen timer.

Use tasks/activities which your child would usually do at school, such as good morning or lunchtime songs – can be found on [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com). Also consider using the feelings chart (Appendix A) in the morning and throughout the day.

Posting/hanging the schedule in your child's room or common area may be helpful. Have your child refer to the schedule to check to see what task/activity is coming up next and reward completed tasks/activities.

Be consistent, and don't give up. Some children become so attached to routines that they become upset at any change. It's important that you help your child develop a little flexibility as well. Use of "?" for surprise activities or when moving tasks around, make it clear on the schedule and explain it to your child.

If they're disappointed about activities being cancelled, consider making a poster together about the things you're going to rebook when it's possible, so they know they won't be forgotten.

This is a big change for your child so a calm down board (Appendix B) is a good way to settle your child during these changes. Further ideas on actions/activities which may help your child to become calm can be found in the sensory section.

Example schedule:

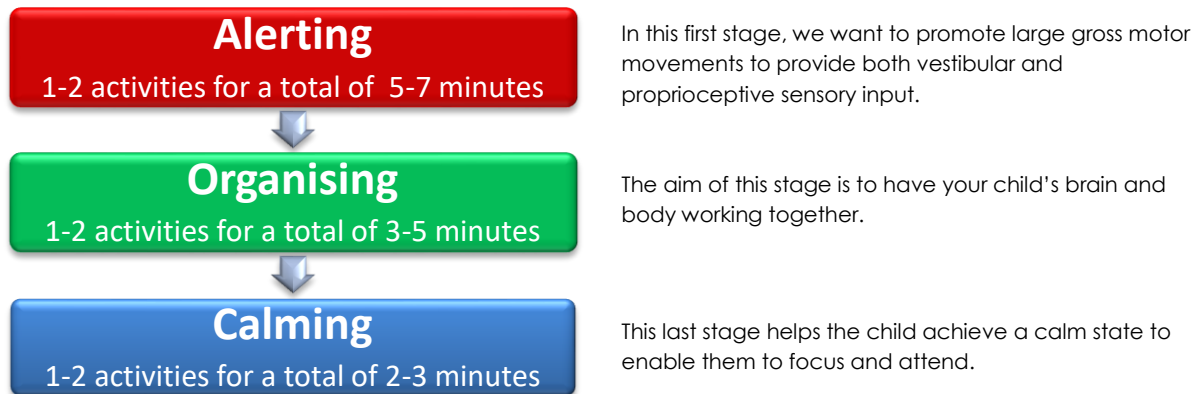
Before 9:00am	Wake up/ morning routine	Eat breakfast, make your bed, wash, put pj's in laundry, etc
9:00 am	Morning walk and sensory activity	On the street or around the garden, maybe Yoga if it's raining or sensory circuit
10.00am	Academic/ learning time	E.g handwriting practice
11.00am	Creative time	Crafting, fine motor, baking, board games or construction i.e. lego, blocks, (not electronic)
12.00pm	Lunch	
12.30pm	Proprioceptive housework/chores time	Wipe table, vacuum, wipe door handles, clean sinks, wash up, etc
1.15pm	Quiet time	Try to avoid electronics
1.45pm	Sensory activity	Sensory tactile bin, burrito wrap in towel
2.00pm	Academic time	
3.00pm	Afternoon fresh air (garden/walk)	On the street or around the garden, maybe Yoga if it's raining (Youtube)
4.00pm	Play time	Crafting, baking, board games or construction i.e. lego, blocks, (not electronic)
5.00pm	Dinner	
5.30pm	Sensory activity	See sensory activates below for ideas
6.00pm	Free time	

If your child responds better to pictures, these can be obtained from <http://www.charltonparkacademy.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Now-and-Next-for-home.pdf>

# Managing sensory needs

## Sensory Circuits

Sensory circuits are a great routine way to start the day and help your child regulate their bodies in preparation for learning and activities. They are composed of three parts, completed in a specific order:



### Alerting activities

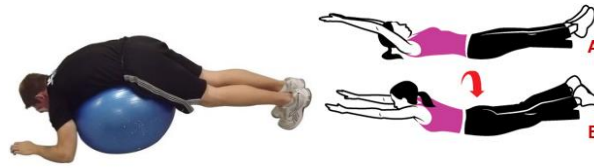
1 to 2 from below list for 5-7 minutes



- Irregular bouncing/rocking/sitting on a therapy ball or trampoline
- Jumping Jacks / star jumps
- Tapping opposite knee with opposite hand
- Under leg claps
- Stomping on the ground or stomp in circles
- Sitting on rocking chair or rocking lounge chair
- Big circular arm movements
- Playing chasing games
- Eating crunchy items such as carrots, cereal, frozen fruit, or try partially freezing fruit juices – sour fruits are more alerting!
- Jumping on the couch, mattress or other soft furniture
- Safe crashing: jump or fall into pile of pillows
- Play upbeat music with a strong beat and open the windows
- Swing around on a swivel computer chair at home
- Put hands into container of beans or rice

## Organising activities

1 to 2 from below list for 3-5 minutes



- Crawling over uneven objects i.e. cushions/through tunnel in an obstacle course
- Rolling over therapy ball and pushing up off floor with hands to hold body.
- Wheelbarrow Walking – Hold your child's legs while they take steps forwards with their hands. Alternately have them place the legs onto a ball or piece of furniture and walk out to grab an item
- Wall pushes – straighten your arms and place your open hands on the wall. Try pushing the wall over. Alternatively, try pushing against wall and then performing a clap
- Complete a puzzle while seated or lying on the floor with elbows propped up
- Log roll - Pick up an object and lay on the mat on your back. Roll to the end of the mat going from tummy to back. Place object in bucket/puzzle board
- Animal walks (See Appendix E)
- Playing with construction toys, lining up dominos or tracks
- Throwing items at a target or into a bucket (can be done sitting or lying on a therapy ball or across a chair)
- Stepping on cushions, or flat objects (can cut out circles of paper) laid out in random order across floor
- Theraputty/playdoh– see the additional resources section for recipes. Kneading with both hands, pinching and pulling out theraputty/playdoh with thumb and index finger to roll into small balls.
- Play "row, row, row your boat" both sitting on the floor, pushing and pulling each other.

## Calming activities

1 to 2 from below list for 2-3 minutes



- Deep pressure – squeezing arm and leg muscles, pushing down on shoulders or back of head
- Rolling/pressing therapy ball, large cushion, or soft object over body while child lies on stomach
- Wrapping child snugly in a matt like a Burrito- wrap/sausage roll
- Chair Press Ups - Sit in a chair placing your hands either side of your body. Raise your body out of your chair using only your hands/arms. Repeat x 5
- Hand massage
- Provide a fidget such as a piece of theraputty/playdoh– see the additional resources section for recipes. or blu-tack, stretchy small toys or tangles
- Blowing bubbles into a bowl/jug through a straw
- Press hands together hard – count to 3 and relax then repeat
- Listening to calming music
- Reading a book to child
- Playing with weighted objects
- Use of vibrating items such as vibrating massage equipment
- Place a few drops of scented oils or extracts on a cotton ball or piece of felt and insert into a ziplock bag or small container with holes in the lid to provide to your child to smell



## Sensory ideas for home

Below are some additional sensory ideas which may help your child within the home.

### CALMING

- Place a bedsheet over a table to act as a dark 'cave', using household items such as blankets, sheets, lamps, cushions and put on some calming music.



- Make your own fidget by putting flour, rice, beans in a balloon



- Wrap up tightly in a blanket and wiggle to get free
- If you go for a walk and have access to a stroller, have the child push the stroller/pushchair with weighted items inside
- Make an indoor hammock swing by using a table and bed sheet. Slow and gentle swings within a hammock or swing. Supervise your child at all times with this activity.



- Make a calming glitter jar- place water, glitter, beads, food colouring, into a jar or bottle

- Sensory bins- Items for a sensory bin can include dried pasta, dried rice, lentils, beads, buttons, stones, seeds, Cups, jugs, ladles, sieves, empty bottles for pouring, etc.



- Messy play ideas:
  - Spray some shaving foam into a container and add some child friendly paint for rainbow effect!



- Make your own slime by combining equal parts cornstarch and water and then food coloring
- Make colourful spaghetti worms by using food coloured and mixing with cooked spaghetti

## ALERTING

- Ball Games- Ball games are good if the child starts to feel anxious or wiggly, mainly because they require focus and attention; use soft balls that can't damage property. Games include throw and catch, bounce and catch, football passes, rolling the ball to each other, etc.
- Tin of Beans Lifts – use tins of beans or bags of sugar/ flour/ pasta to 'weight lift'. Lift over your head, raise items straight out in front of you; raise items up to your sides. Try to keep your arms straight.
- Proprioceptive Housework such as (These can also be used in alerting step of the sensory circuit):
  - Vacuuming (heavy work)
  - Washing the windows
  - Wiping the tables
  - Wiping/washing the skirting boards and door frames (lots of extensions, changes in movement, very good for sensory input)
  - Washing up (getting wet can also meet other sensory needs)
  - Mopping the floor / sweeping the floor
  - Carrying laundry
  - Make your bed/ change your bed linen
  - Water plants
  - Wipe down doors

## Fine motor activities

Below are suggestions for activities in all areas of fine motor skills. Be mindful of fatigue and it is good to start with completing fine motor activities for up to 5 minutes and then gradually increasing daily towards 15 minutes. Mix up the activities/games which you do to keep things interesting. Remember this is not a full list so get creative!

### Grip strength

- Pulling, squeezing, rolling playdoh; try ask your child to find objects inside the playdoh—you can make this at home if you do not have playdoh\*. See Appendix D for more examples
- Use a sponge/cloth to soak up water and then squeeze/wring it out to transfer the water to another container. Great for kids who love water!
- Using a hole punch on various thickness of paper
- Playing tug of war games

### Pincer grip

- Connecting/ separating construction toys e.g. Lego
- Cut a coin slot out of a “Pringles” lid or other container and have your child pick up coins from the table (Encourage them to avoid sliding the coins off the edge of the table and pick them up using their pincer grip) and slot them through the coin slot. Have your child alternate from left to right or use both hands at the same time. Make into a game and time your child and have them try to beat their previous time.
- Use clothes pegs and have your child put them on/off a plastic or paper plate or edge of a box. Alternately have them put them on an item of interest or soft toy to increase engagement.
- Pinching, pulling, squeezing, playdoh; try having your child find objects inside the playdoh—you can make this at home if you do not have playdoh (refer to additional resources section for recipes. See Appendix D for more examples.
- Use tongs, tweezers, connected chop sticks to pick up small objects such as pom poms, cotton balls, balls of play doh, other small items and objects. Make it into a game and sort items into colours or to put the items into different size cups/containers
- Play with spray bottles or water guns with triggers and try to hit targets or water plants

## Fine motor dexterity (Co-ordination) & Bilateral integration/motor skills

- Construction toys which require interlocking, threading, screwing, pinching, rotating pieces – lego, constructions kits with nuts and bolts etc.
- Threading –use string and thread items such a macaroni, cut-up straws, beads, cheerios
- Craft projects, cutting/gluing, shaping or small items to construct items of interest
- Playing with cars/trains on a track
- Tearing/ crumpling tissue or regular paper
- Playing catch/ throw games to encourage coordinating both hands
- Playing with musical instruments or make your own, e.g using utensils on buckets/pails as a drum
- Use both hands on the squirt water gun to try and knock over cups, wash away chalk etc.
- Watering the garden
- Have your child participate with cooking tasks such as mixing, using cookie cutters, kneading dough
- Cutting with Scissors – On paper or card, draw different sized shapes (Circles, squares, stars) and draw faces on the shapes and have your child cut them out! If this is too difficult draw different length lines on the edge of the paper/card and have your child practicing cutting up to the end of the line and no further. If scissors too hard practice tearing paper along lines and then scrunch it and aim at a goal eg waste paper basket.
- Bopping a balloon back and forth or popping bubbles with both hands
- Playing catch/ throw games to encourage coordinating both hands

## In-hand manipulation (Ability to control object/s in the hand)

- Open and close twist ties on bread and bakery bags.
- Practice screwing toothpaste cap on and off.
- Pick up items (Beads, blocks, lego, balls) one at a time and try to pick up as many as you can in one hand
- Flipping coins in hands
- Wind up toys
- Playdoh/theraputty exercises in hand or using all fingers–you can make this at home if you do not have playdoh – see the additional resources section for recipes. See Appendix D for more examples.

## Shoulder stability and strengthening

- Wheelbarrow Walking – Hold your child's legs while they take steps forwards with their hands. Alternately have them place the legs onto a ball or piece of furniture and walk out to grab an item



- Animal walks – See appendix E
- Tug of war
- Wall pushes – straighten your arms and place your open hands on the wall. Try pushing the wall over. Alternatively, try claps between wall pushes
- Drawing on paper on the wall at shoulder level – Draw big circles and squiggles with both hands, then number/letter each of the areas within the squiggles to represent two different colours. Have the child place colour in all the spaces with the two different markers.
- Clean a blackboard/whiteboard or place items up high on board for child to reach
- Hit a suspended ball or balloon with a bat
- Pushing game - Stand opposite your child and place the palms of your hands against your child's hands. try pushing each other over
- Skipping - or turn a skipping rope for a group skipping game
- Throwing a ball against a wall and catching
- Play Twister
- Sitting on floor, on a chair at a table or kneeling and rolling ball backwards and forwards (extending and bending elbows) across floor or table
- Popping bubbles above shoulder level
- Painting on large canvas or sheets – encouraging large movements across body
- Wiping/cleaning table top

## Handwriting

### Pencil and grip:

Children use different pencil grips at different stages of their development. If your child writes using a fist grasp, they may not yet have the pincer grip or co-ordination to be able to hold the pencil with just three fingers (tripod grasp). Forcing them to use this grasp may cause more harm than good as it can create poor habits. First practice the pincer grip (thumb, index and middle finger) activities in the fine motor section above. As they progress with these their hand muscles will become stronger so you can then encourage use of a tripod grasp.

Consider using a pencil grip (If you don't have this at home, try blue tack or tape around the pen to build up the thickness) for a more efficient tripod grasp which may help to reduce fatigue due to less pressure needed from other parts of the hand/arm in order to engage in writing tasks. Using a larger marker (colouring pen, marker pen, thicker pencil/pen) will require less effort and should be considered if your child struggles to hold a thinner pencil.



Pencil grips

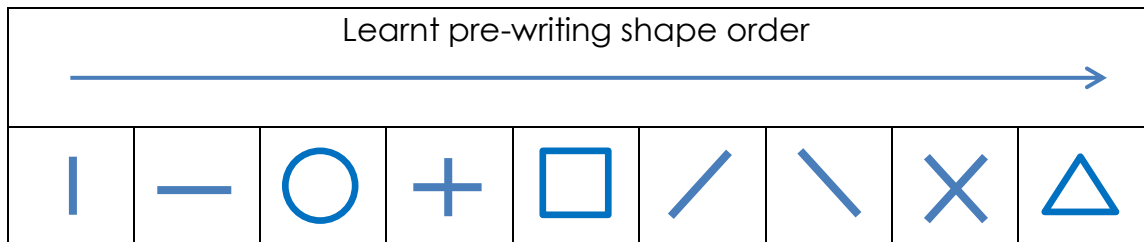
### Sensory Mark Making:

If your child does not have interest in holding a marker or mark making, you can still engage them in learning pre-writing shapes (Below).

- Try drawing letters with the index finger in different materials such as sand, paint or shaving foam or practice writing in the air
- Use pipe cleaners, theraputty/playdoh– see the additional resources section for recipes, to create shapes of pre writing shapes or letters. Once the shape or letter is formed trial drawing around the letter (use as a stencil) and take it off the paper to provide feedback on the formation of shape/letter
- Try using markers with different weights, size and shape; try crayons, chalk, paint brushes as well – Mark making is not just limited to pencils and pens!

Pre-writing shapes:

- Before children learn to write letters they must first learn to write pre-writing shapes. Children learn to write pre-writing shapes in a particular order, this is shown below:



- The first step is to have your child overwrite pre-writing shapes, this is using a marker (pencil, pen, felt tip, crayon) to draw over the top of the existing shape. Also known as tracing – this can be over the top of a solid shape or the dotted outline of the shape
- The next step is to be able to copy the shape below the existing shape
- Lastly your child will then be able to draw the shape with verbal prompting only and no visual shape to reference from
- As your child progresses through the order of pre-writing shapes, you can start overwriting and copying of letters – see letter formation section

If your child is struggling with pre-writing shapes or letters, try some of the following:

- Use hand over hand assistance to encourage holding the marker and drawing pre-writing shapes
- Use stencils for pre-writing shape/letter formation. This could be blocks or toys similar to the shape of pre-writing shapes and drawing around them with a marker
- Join the dot activities with engaging pictures such as animals/transport
- When drawing the pre-writing shapes sound out the word of the shape to your child for example “down”, “line”, “circle”, “cross”.

### Letter Formation:

- As you progress through pre-writing shapes or once pre-writing shapes are achieved, start with letters that contain only vertical and horizontal lines (L, I, E, F, H, T). Slowly introduce letters with curves (C, D O, P, B). Finally end with letters with diagonal lines (A, N, M, W, Q, Z).
- Follow the steps of overwriting then copying below then free writing
- When writing letters sound out the letter to your child

### Sitting on the line:

- Try using Sky Grass Soil paper (See Appendix F) or 3 lined paper:
  - Encourage child to put the body of the letter in the green (grass) section, any ascenders should reach up into the blue (sky) section and any descenders should reach down into the brown (soil) section.
  - Use verbal cues such as 'the g digs down into the soil'.
  - Make sure you use a version of the paper that is an appropriate size for the writing you want them to produce.

### Common writing issues:

- Child writes with a weak or "floppy" grasp with very light marking on the paper/sheet: Consider completing some pincer grip or shoulder stability activities (See Fine motor section).
- Child pushes too hard down onto the paper: Trial using a textured sheet such as sand paper underneath the paper or a soft surface like a mouse pad. This will provide sensory feedback to the child and will teach them that if they push too hard it will create a hole in the paper.
- Child's letters are inconsistent in sizing: Trial writing with lined paper (or sky, grass, ground writing sheet – Appendix F) and use verbal prompting to stay in the lines, alternately trial use of grid paper and have the child only place one letter in each box and ensure that they stay within the lines
- Child has inconsistent spacing between words: Trial fusing a finger space between words, or if using grid paper, having the child leave blocks in the grid blank



## Ipad/technology tips and suggestions

Technology can be extremely helpful and useful within the home. Below are some suggestions and ideas on how to get the most out of technology at home.

### Managing screen time

Use your child's routine to make technology available in specific contexts or at specific times of day. Do this at the point of introducing a new piece of technology. Try not to let your child keep technology in their room as it may disrupt their sleep.

Use the battery life as a way to manage technology use. Lots of parents reported to us that their children understood the idea of a battery running out and needing to be re-charged. Children can handle this better than someone taking away their device after a fixed period of time.

Use an online timer or app to help you keep a track of how long your child spends on a device. Some timers will automatically shut down the device after a period of time.

Use different coloured cases on your tablet or smartphone, each colour signalling to your child when they are allowed to just play, and when they are 'working' or doing activities with you.

Only use the bed for sleep at night (not sitting on it on iPads during the day, for example). No screens an hour before bed!

Children find the device very motivating, and this is a good opportunity to use it to encourage new skills.

### Suggested Apps

See the below link for some suggestions for some great apps for learning, calming, sensory, visual, language, literacy, fine motor plus many more:

<http://redbridgeserc.org/resources/category/apps>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/cbeebies/puzzles>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/cbeebies/shows/something-special>

## Additional Resources

Interested in more information? Feel free to access the below resources which we think you may find helpful!

Useful resources in all areas:

<http://redbridgeserc.org/resources>

OT blog with helpful at home tips:

<https://www.teachingtheotway.com/post/high-five-to-friday>

Handwriting without tears:

<https://www.lwtears.com/hwt>

Cosmic Kids yoga – Activity for kids:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=769&v=LhYtcadR9nw&feature=emb\\_title](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=769&v=LhYtcadR9nw&feature=emb_title)

Extensive playdoh recipe list:

<https://www.sensory-processing-disorder.com/play-doh-recipes.html>

Facebook group for Covid-19 resources for children with special needs:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/3074955429234543/>

Links for information on Covid-19:

<https://www.autism.org.uk/services/helplines/coronavirus>

At-Home Activities:

<https://www.whattoexpect.com/news/toddler/at-home-toddler-activities-coronavirus-outbreak/>

<https://chatterpack.net/blogs/blog/list-of-online-resources-for-anyone-who-is-isolated-at-home>

Social Stories about COVID-19:










<https://littlepuddins.ie/coronavirus-social-story/>

<https://carolgraysocialstories.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Pandemics-and-the-Coronavirus.pdf>

## Appendices

### Appendix A – Feelings chart


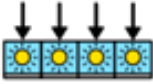
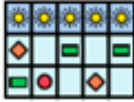










I am feeling...

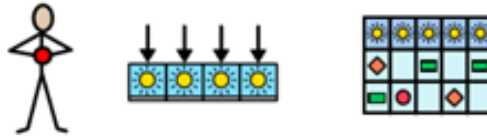
 happy	 fine	 excited	
 sad	 bored	 tired	 poorly
 angry	 pain		

Appendix B – Calm down board example














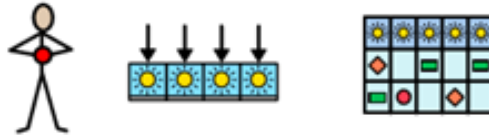
Appendix C – My daily Schedule template

  	
My Daily Schedule	
 6 AM	
 6:30 AM	
 7 AM	
 7:30 AM	
 8 AM	
 8:30 AM	
 9 AM	
 9:30 AM	
 10 AM	
 10:30 AM	














## My Daily Schedule

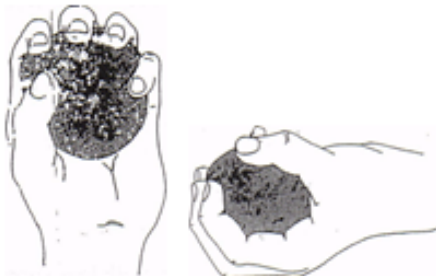




 11 AM	
 11:30 AM	
 12 PM	
 12:30 PM	
 1: PM	
 1:30 PM	
 2 PM	
 2:30 PM	
 3 PM	
 3:30 PM	
 4 PM	



## My Daily Schedule









 4:30 PM	
 5 PM	
 5:30 PM	
 6 PM	
 6:30 PM	
 7 PM	
 7:30 PM	
 8 PM	
 8:30 PM	
 9 PM	
 9:30 PM	

Appendix D - Additional Theraputty/playdoh activities

<p><b>Grasp</b> Squeeze 10-20 times using alternate hands,</p>	
<p><b>In hand/finger manipulation</b> Rotate ball of with finger tips. Use fingers not palm of hand.</p>	
<p><b>Shoulder engagement</b> Roll into a long sausage making sure it is the same thickness all the way through.</p>	
<p><b>Pincer/Bilateral integration</b> Hold sausage with one hand. With the other hand, pinch between thumb and index finger and thumb and middle finger. Make indentations with the fleshy pads of fingers and thumb without breaking the sausage. Repeat alternating hands.</p>	
<p><b>Pinch grip</b> Pinch into a peak using the thumb against the index and middle finger.</p>	



Appendix E – Animal Walks

<p><b>Elephant walk</b> Bend forward at the waist with your hands clasped together and your arms hanging down. Walk, swinging your 'trunk' from side to side.</p>	
<p><b>Seal walk</b> Lie on your stomach with your hands under your shoulders. Straighten your arms and 'walk' forward, dragging your legs behind you.</p>	
<p><b>Crab walk</b> On all fours with tummy facing up, walk in all directions; try to keep bottom level with knees. Try playing games such as football by kicking your legs.</p>	
<p><b>Frog hops</b> Hop forward from a squatting position, landing on your hands first, then your feet.</p>	
<p><b>Inch worm</b> Start on your hands and feet. Walk your hands forward as far as possible. Then walk your feet up to your hands. Repeat, moving first your hands, then your feet.</p>	
<p><b>Mule kick</b> Squat with your hands resting on the floor. Lean forward and kick both legs backwards and upwards as quickly as you can, then return to a squatting position. Just try and do very little kicks to start with.</p>	
<p><b>Stork stand</b> Stand on one foot. Place your non-support foot against the knee of your support leg. Place your hands on your hips. Try to maintain your balance.</p>	
<p><b>Bear walk</b> Assume a creeping posture, progress forwards or backwards, moving arms and legs of the same side simultaneously. Keep your head down.</p>	

Appendix F – Soil, ground, sky writing sheet

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