

NEUROFIBROMATOSIS TYPE1 (Nf1) - HANDWRITING

Children with Nf1 may have very poor handwriting.

This can be attributed to their lack of fine motor skills.

Learning pencil control in order to produce smooth, fluid and continuous lines when writing requires a great deal of fine motor movements. The child with Nf1 may struggle to form letters that are legible – instead they're too large, too small, stretched or jittery.

The Nf1 child will often develop an abnormal grip to compensate for the lack of muscle development in their hand. You might notice that the child either holds the pencil so tightly that their knuckles are white – or they hold the pencil so lightly that it hardly makes an impression on the paper.

Giving the child the opportunity to develop their fine motor skills will benefit not only their handwriting but also scissor skills, buttoning and zipping, holding cutlery and more.

Allowing the child to use *theraputty* for a few minutes before starting a writing exercise can be beneficial. Making it a class exercise will make the Nf1 child feel less "different".

Experiment with different pencils and grips to find which, if any, the child finds comfortable.

Try a slant board. The angled position of the slant board can help with placement of the shoulder, arm and hand therefore providing a better position to work. The slanting also brings the paper closer to the child and makes it easier to see. The positioning can also assist in applying the right amount of muscle force in holding a pencil. The slant board can also help with posture by bringing the line of vision higher which encourages looking down to promote an upright posture.

Consider providing the Nf1 child with a laptop. This will help the child produce better and more legible work. Encourage keyboard skills. Although writing can be improved the Nf1 child will not be able to write pages and pages of notes. The lack of fine motor skills means the child can experience pain from writing at length.

Think ahead to secondary school work and start to prepare the child with the keyboard skills that could mean the difference between succeeding and failing at this level.

Handwriting can have an effect on children in many lessons and ultimately during examinations which can give a poor reflection of their true intellect.