

## Information on Left Handedness



Approximately one in eight people are left-handed. There are many theories about what causes left-handedness, ranging from it being a sign of the devil to a genetic flaw, but the truth is that the real cause is unknown. What is known is that left-handedness is completely natural and need not be a barrier to a normal life. However, all left-handers, and particularly children, run into many small obstacles in the course of everyday life. This is because the world is generally designed with right-handed people in mind. Left-handers can become proficient at dealing with these obstacles; however, it takes a little more practise as a child, and a little more patience from parents and teachers.

### Common problems include:

**Dressing;** Buttons, belts, zips and shoelaces can be difficult for left-handers if they are taught a right handed method.

**Reading and writing;** The whole concept of left to right movement is often difficult for left handers to grasp as right to left seems more natural for them. It is also difficult to push a pencil across a page, as opposed to pulling it like right handers do. (See below for more details). Letter reversals are also sometimes more common. (See Reversals Home Program and Letter Formation Home Program if necessary).

**Scissor skills;** Most scissors are designed to cut better for right handers, however, left-handed scissors do exist and should be purchased for left handed users. They have handles contoured for left hands, and the blades are positioned so the left blade moves up when the scissors are opened, as opposed to right-handed scissors. This means that the movement of the left thumb pushes the blades together as it closes the scissors, making the cut sharp. The orientation of the blades also enable a left handed child to more adequately monitor the exact point of the cut.

**Toys and games;** Often preschool toys are orientated for right-handed children, with knobs that twist clockwise, and objects kept on the right hand side of the game board, which can be tricky for left-handed children.

**Grooming and feeding;** Left-handers sometimes have problems with their knife and fork, or combing their hair to part it on the same side as their mother or father.

All these problems can be overcome with practise. The most important thing to remember is that the teaching method is crucial in the child's learning. The best way to teach a left-handed child is to position yourself behind the child, and guide their left hand with your left hand. To be able to do this you must practise doing some things with your left hand. For example, tying shoe laces can be simple for left-handers, but it needs to be complete mirror image to a right-handed technique. Similarly, knives and forks may be held in opposite hands, so you might have to practise that technique to be able to teach it to your child if they are having trouble with the right-handed technique. The best person to teach a left-handed child is a left-handed adult; so if you are having difficulty, then perhaps a left-handed uncle, or close friend can help.

*Under no circumstances should you try and change a child's preference.* If they are left-handed, encourage and develop their left-hand co-ordination and strength. Until recently it was common practise to force left-handers to write with their right hands. This switching can cause serious problems later in life, including:

- ✘ Decreased proficiency with left hand, which can result in clumsiness and poor reflexes.
- ✘ Confusion and poor self-confidence caused by people continually telling them they are using the 'wrong' hand.
- ✘ Poor sense of direction due to a decreased awareness of the distinction between left and right, which is highly based on our own idea of dominance.
- ✘ Reading and writing problems. Especially writing problems, because, although left-handers may be able to write with their right hands, they may not ever master it, causing problems in note taking in school, legibility, hand fatigue etc.
- ✘ Speech problems due to weakening of the connections between the left- and right-hand side of the brain. Stammering and stuttering can remain problems into adulthood.

### **Left Handed Handwriting:**



Learning to write can be more difficult for left handed children. Children learn new skills by imitating others. If they feel more comfortable using their left hand while everyone around them is using their right, they may feel confused, frustrated, or think they are doing something wrong. It is important to encourage a child's left-handedness and make sure that they are comfortable with it.

One of the main problems that all left handers find with writing is the fact that they have to push their pen across the page rather than pulling it. This can affect writing in a number of ways. Firstly, pushing is a harder movement to make, and writing can become jerky, as the





movement of the arm across the page is not one fluent sliding motion, but more stop-start in nature. Constant practise with mazes, dot-to-dots, etc that promote a sliding left to right movement can improve this skill.

Secondly, because the pen is in front of the hand, it is difficult and sometimes impossible to see what has just been written. Add to this the fact that often the left hand smudges the writing, makes writing even more frustrating. The obvious solution is to position the hand differently so that it's out of the way. To do this left handers often push their wrist forward above the writing and hook their hand around so that they are effectively writing from above. This position also naturally forces the pencil to tilt further forward in the fingers and rest around the middle knuckle of the index finger. This is an extremely difficult position to maintain and causes fatigue and less control of the pencil. The best way to position the paper for left handed writers is to tilt it on the same angle as the left forearm. Make sure that the pencil is resting in the web space between the thumb and forefinger, and that the child is holding the pencil 2 cm from the end. This will provide a greater line of sight with the writing and will keep the hand below the writing so that it will not smudge it as they write.

All children, when they are first learning to write will often swap hands to experiment. Left-handed children may do this more than other children as they continually see other people using their right hands. This is normal. It is important that they think that they are different or doing anything wrong as this can impact on self-esteem.

Just like scissors there are left handed grips and special pencils that can correct grip problems in left handers. These are available in most stationary stores.

**Points to remember**

<p>1. Tilt page to right.</p> 	<p>4. Steady page with right hand.</p> 
<p>2. Keep left hand underneath writing line.</p> 	<p>5. Hold pencil a little further from the point approx 2 - 3cm).</p> 
<p>3. Keep page to left of mid-line.</p>	<p>6. Check posture and furniture.</p>