

A Parent Guide to Supporting Your Left-Handed Child



Supporting Your Left-Handed Child to Write

If your child is left-handed, they may find certain things (such as learning to write, cutting with scissors or doing up buttons) slightly more challenging. This has nothing to do with your child's ability to learn; this is more to do with the fact that they live in a world that feels largely designed for right-handers. However, this is nothing to worry about – with plenty of love, support and encouragement, your left-handed child can learn to do all of these things just as well as their right-handed friends!

When will you know if a child is left-handed?

By the time your child is five years old, you should have a clear idea as to which hand your child prefers to use. Some children demonstrate a clear dominance in one hand as early as 18 months while other children may switch between using both hands for a lot longer. Most children show a preference for their left or right hand by the time they are four years old. Observe which hand your child uses for things such as holding finger food, rolling a ball, holding cutlery or drawing with a crayon. Over time, your child will eventually work out which hand (left or right) feels more comfortable for them to use.

Why is your child left-handed?

There's no single reason as to why a child develops a preference for using their left hand. It could be a combination of different factors, with genetics often playing a part. The important thing to remember is that there's nothing wrong whatsoever with being left-handed. Only about 10% of people are left-handed, meaning that the world is often geared more towards right-handers. Therefore, so many things can feel backwards! However, this does not mean that your child should ever be discouraged from writing or performing other tasks with their left hand. It won't ever feel natural for your child to use their right hand, so the approach should never be to try and somehow switch their dominant hand. Instead, it's important to fully embrace your child's left-handedness by developing your own understanding while learning about different ways to support them.



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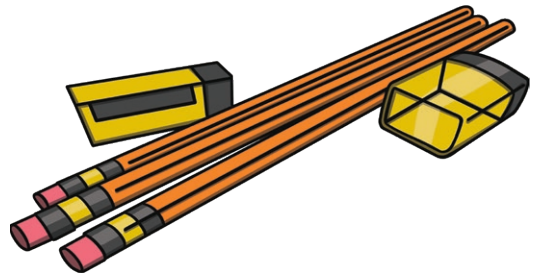
Being left-handed can make learning to write that little bit more daunting. Possible challenges that your left-handed child could face include:

- using writing equipment or worksheets that are designed for right-handers, not left-handers;
- struggling to find a body position that feels comfortable while writing;
- writing with a hooked hand position that feels uncomfortable or painful;
- covering up what they have written;
- smudging their work.

By supporting your left-handed child with the following ideas in this parent guide, you can help them to become a much more confident writer. That boost in confidence will also encourage your child to develop a positive enthusiasm for writing; they may even seek extra opportunities to practise their writing even more at home!

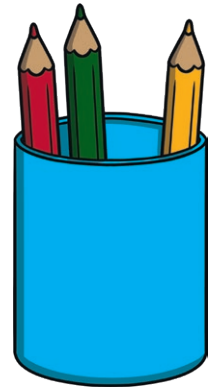
Change Equipment

Firstly, you may want to consider the writing equipment that your left-handed child has access to at home. Sometimes, the right equipment can make all the difference!



Pencils

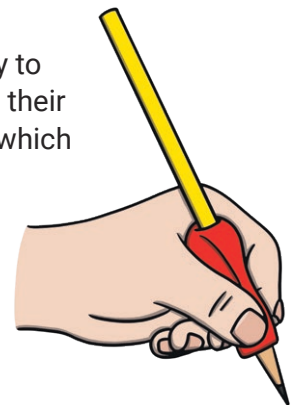
Between the ages of five and seven, most children use a pencil when writing (whether they are left-handed or right-handed). It's a lot easier for a child to make corrections when they can easily rub out their work. For your left-handed child, you may want to consider using a soft pencil without a sharp, pointed tip at the end. Left-handers often have a tendency to exert more pressure while writing, therefore a sharp pencil could end up piercing the paper.



If you wanted to, you could even look into buying a mechanical pencil that is ergonomically designed for left-handers. These pencils are great for early writers and help children who often find a pencil too 'slippery' to hold.

Pencil Grips

Whether a child is left-handed or right-handed, the tripod grip is the encouraged way to hold a pencil. The use of a pencil grip is a great way to encourage your child to hold their pencil with a tripod grasp. There are many types of pencil grips available to buy, all which encourage correct positioning of your child's fingers; you can even purchase left-handed pencil grips specifically for left-handers.



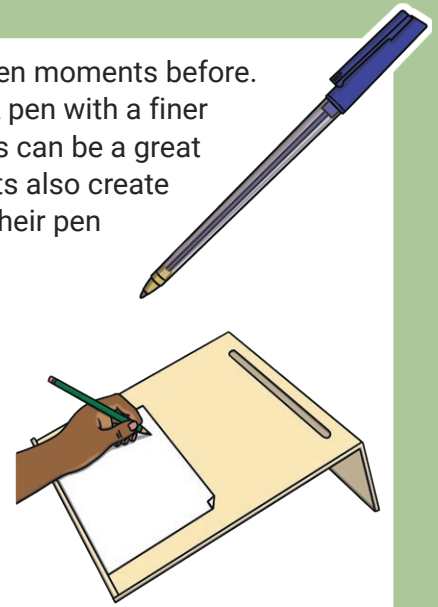
Pens

It's important not to introduce a pen until your left-handed child is confident and ready. As left-handers constantly cover the work they have just written, this can consequently lead to a fair few frustrations! One of these frustrations

includes smudging ink as your child's hand smudges the words they have written moments before. Therefore, consider carefully the type of pen that your left-handed child uses. A pen with a finer point deposits less ink on the page, meaning less ink to smudge. Ballpoint pens can be a great choice as the ink dries much more quickly while writing. Pens such as ballpoints also create less friction when writing – helpful for left-handed writers who typically 'push' their pen across the paper.

Writing Slope

It can be very hard for a left-hander to read what they have just written. However, the use of a writing slope may make it slightly easier for your child to do this, as well as being a great aid for improving posture. There are many types of writing slopes that you can buy or, alternatively, you could use a lever arch file turned sideways.



Change Body Position

The last thing you want is for your left-hander to feel uncomfortable while writing. Here are a few tips for encouraging the best body position possible:

Light can make all the difference! Your left-handed child doesn't want to feel like they are constantly working in the shadow of their hand. Ensure that a light source (whether that be natural light or a desk lamp) is shining to the right of your child.

Encourage your child to sit on the right-hand side of their desk, giving them plenty of space to write to their left.

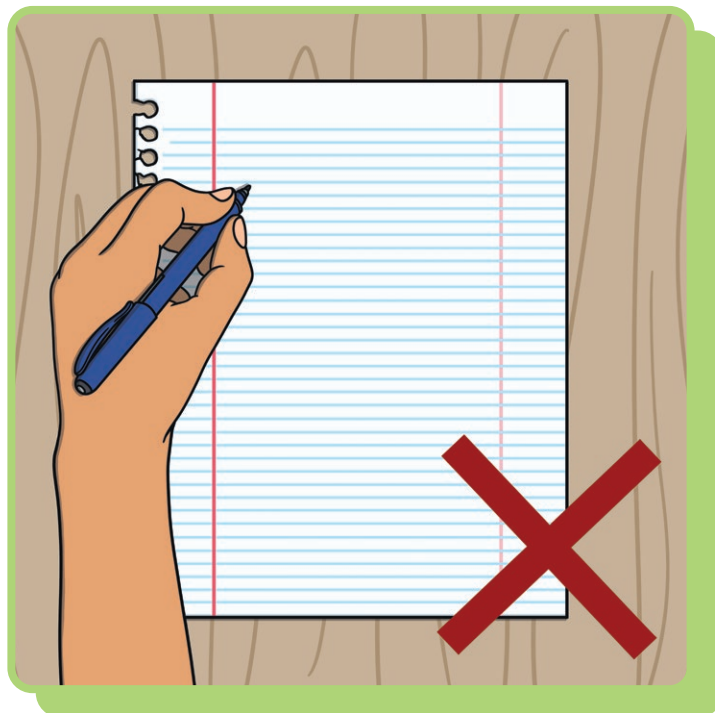
A slightly higher chair can be helpful for left-handed writers. Being higher up allows your child to see over their hand a lot more easily.

Have a chat with your child's teacher about their seated position in class. When sharing a desk with a right-handed child, it's useful for a left-hander to sit on the left-hand side. This position gives your child much more space to write. It also reduces the chance of your child bumping elbows (or paper) with the pupil they are sitting next to.

Change Paper Position

It's not just body position that's important – the position of the paper is important too. When your left-handed child writes, they want to avoid a hunched over position which can become uncomfortable very quickly! The position of the paper (or notebook) your child is writing on can make all the difference.

Try to discourage your left-handed child from positioning their paper like this:



Instead, show your child how they can turn their paper so that it's angled to the right:



Here are a few things to remember when helping your left-handed child to position their paper:

Tilting the paper is not just helpful for left-handers; it's helpful for right-handers too. However, the direction of the tilt is important and for left-handers – the paper should always be tilted to the right.

The optimum paper tilt is somewhere between 30 - 45 degrees.

While writing with their left hand, encourage your child to use their right hand to hold the paper. This will make them feel a lot more 'stable' as they write.

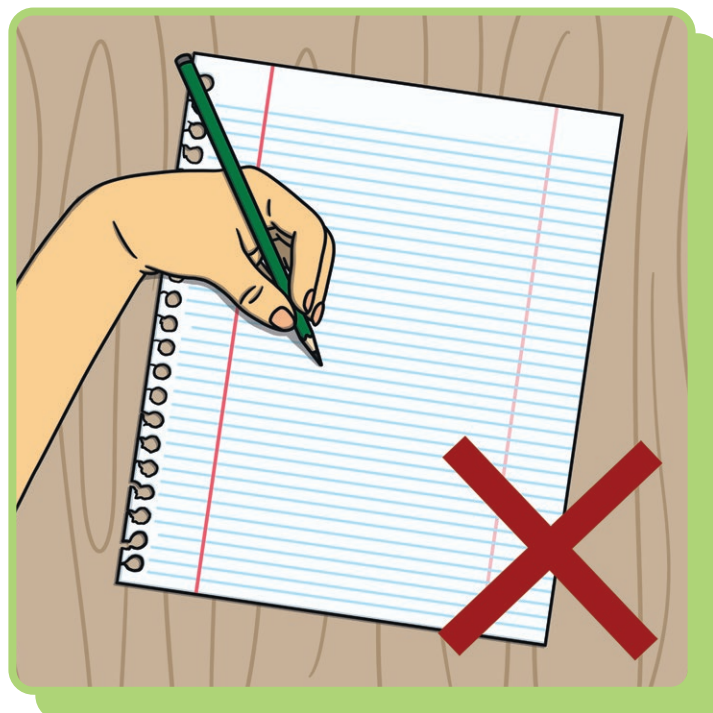
The paper should be to the left of your child on the desk.

Encourage your child to push the paper further away from them before tilting it.

Change Hand Position

Using the correct hand position is so important for your left-handed child to practise and gain confidence with. Because left-handers cover up what they have written, it's common for them to adapt by writing with a hooked or arched hand position. However, this type of writing position can become painful very quickly.

If your child complains that it hurts to write, it's important to check that they aren't writing with a hooked hand position:



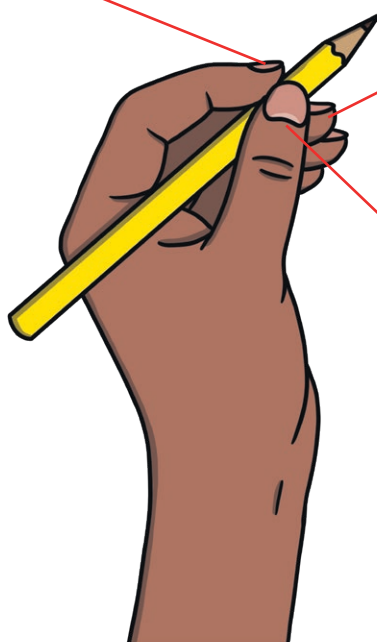
Instead, encourage your child to keep their wrist straight and below the line that they are writing on. This hand position is a lot more comfortable and may even reduce the amount of smudging too!



When it comes to holding the pencil itself, show your child how to write with a tripod grip:

index finger (tip)

middle finger (side)



thumb (pad)

Like right-handers, left-handers are also encouraged to adopt the tripod grip when writing. However, it is better for left-handers to hold their pencil slightly further away from the point – the ideal position is about 3 cm up. You could wrap an elastic band around your child’s pencil to show them where they need to hold it.

Adapt Writing Activities

Typically, worksheets aren’t designed with left-handers in mind. For example, on handwriting sheets, there are often printed words that a child needs to copy. However, these words are often printed on the left-hand side of the paper, meaning that a left-hander will cover the words while writing.

Look out for printed activities that are specifically designed with left-handed children in mind. For example, our **Letter Formation Practice for Left Handers** activity has all the letters printed on the right-hand side of the page.



Naturally, your child may want to start on the right-hand side of a page. Remind your child to start writing on the top left corner of a page before working their way down (travelling from left to right with their pencil). Occasionally, left-handers develop a few ‘tricks’ as they write, such as forming letters backwards. Try to look out for these ‘tricks’ and address these with your child sensitively while helping them to develop their writing.

Supporting Your Left-Handed Child with Other Key Skills

Living in what feels like a right-handed world, there are other activities aside from writing that may take a little longer for your left-handed child to get their head around. With a little support and patience, however, they will be able to master these activities just as well!

Reading

This doesn't apply to all left-handed children but, for some, they may have a tendency to want to read from right to left – therefore, your child may attempt to read words back to front. It may be helpful to put a little star on the top left-hand corner of a page to remind your child to start reading from the left.



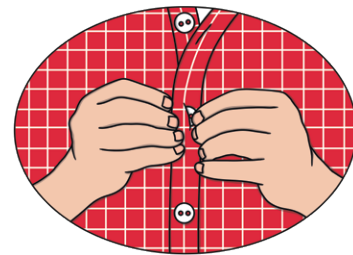
Eating

During meal times, you may have already noticed your child using their left hand to eat finger foods or hold a spoon. When it comes to using cutlery, left-handed children don't tend to flip their cutlery (so no need to lay their place on the dinner table any differently). However, when cutting food, it may be useful for your child to hold the table knife in their left hand.



Dressing

When it comes to getting dressed, some things (such as buttons and zips) may feel a little back-to-front for your left-handed child. If buttons and zips feel like a greater challenge, that's because they are! Like most things, patience is key while allowing your child plenty of opportunities to practise. Similarly, learning how to tie shoelaces may be confusing to a left-hander if they are learning from someone who is right-handed. If you are right-handed, try to show your child how to tie shoe laces by standing opposite them instead – this gives your child a mirror image to copy.



Cutting with Scissors

Trying to cut paper with a right-handed pair of scissors is extremely difficult for a left-handed child; even cutting out the simplest of shapes can be a huge challenge. For a left-hander, the blades are on the wrong side meaning that it's tricky to see the cutting line. Luckily, there are plenty of left-handed scissors available to buy, making this activity a lot easier for your child to practise. The blades on a left-handed pair of scissors are reversed, giving your child a much better view of what they're cutting.



Using a Computer

Computers are often set up with right-handers in mind. However, a few simple adaptations can really help your child to feel a lot more comfortable while working or playing on a computer. For example, you can switch the computer mouse so that it's positioned on the left-hand side of the computer. Within your computer settings, it's also possible to change the main 'clicking button'. It's even possible to buy computer mice that are specifically shaped for a left-hander to use.



We hope you find the information on our website and resources useful. As far as possible, the contents of this resource are reflective of current professional research. However, please be aware that every child is different and information can quickly become out of date. The information given here is intended for general guidance purposes only and may not apply to your specific situation.