Children's Treatment Network

Building Brighter Futures Together

Developing Keyboarding Skills

Printing can be very difficult for some children. The effort to remember how to form the letters can make it harder to think about spelling, grammar and ideas in general. Keyboarding can be a great option for these children because it helps them to concentrate on ideas, increase the speed of output and helps other people read their work more easily. Some children are able to produce longer and better written stories or answers when they keyboard.

Keyboarding is a life skill for all children. The decision whether or not to use technology in the classroom should take several factors into consideration. If the decision is made to allow increased use of technology, students should continue to be supported to use handwriting, as needed to maintain that skill.

Signs that the use of technology may be helpful:
- Poor fine motor and motor coordination skills (Difficulty grasping a pencil, forming letters correctly, sitting letters on the line and poor pencil control)
- Messy or hard to read printing
- Slow printing speed
- Increased effort required when printing
- Sore or tired hands when printing
- Difficulty focusing during printing activities

Why to use technology:
If any of the above are seen, it may be helpful to try using technology to complete written work. Technology may help the child to improve their printing by increasing their willingness to try, increasing the amount of work completed and how their work looks.

Examples include:
- Students may be better able to show their knowledge
- Student may be more willing to edit their work when writing is not required
- Student may be willing to participate without the struggle of letter formation and/or a tired or sore hand
- Student may be able to complete more work in a shorter period of time
- Work will be easier to read and better organized on the page which helps the teacher to better assess what they know

Considerations:
- Keyboarding and computer use need to be taught before this technology will be successful
- If keyboarding skills are slow and the student is older and has adequate verbal skills, then voice to text software may be helpful
- There are many options for improving output and computer use, including word prediction software, work sheet converters, graphic organizers and writing templates

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When keyboarding, each finger is responsible for specific letters/keys and must move separately from the other fingers. This controlled movement requires the coordination of the small muscles in the hand and fingers. For some children this may be very challenging. The following exercises and activities are designed to promote hand skills needed for keyboarding.
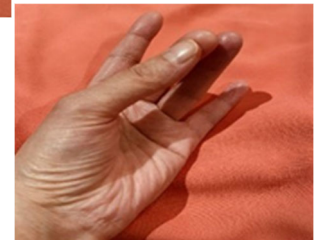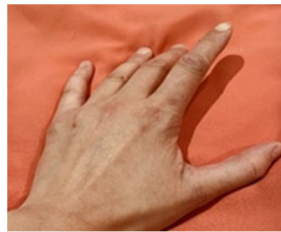
Spider Push-Ups:
- Place both hands together with palms and fingers touching
- Push the hands away from each other at the palm. The fingertips should remain in contact

Finger Pick-Ups:
- Place hands flat on desk
- Raise each finger and hold for 3 seconds

Fingertip Touch:
- Touch the tips of each finger with the thumbs
- Touch the tip of the thumb to the base of each finger
- Repeat with above with the other hand
- Exercise may be done at different speeds

Spider Crawl:
- Place both hands on desk. Palms should be flat
- "Crawl" hands across the desk like spiders
- Both hands may move together or individually in different directions

Practice flicking a ball or playing finger soccer with each finger, one at a time

Pinch along a playdoh worm with thumb and each finger individually

Squeeze pompoms, clothespins, etc., and pop bubble wrap taking turns with the thumb and each finger individually
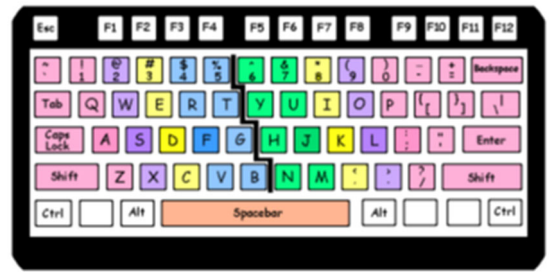
Developing Keyboarding Skills

Ensure good posture before keyboarding. Both feet should be resting on the ground and forearms resting on the table with the hands in the ready position. Hands should stay on the keyboard rather than taking them away after each time they hit the key.

Both hands should be used at all times. Remind the child to use their left hand for keys to the left of the line and their right hand for keys to right of the line. Place a pipe cleaner, Wikki Stix (hand knitting yarn coated with wax) or colored piece of tape down the middle of the keyboard.

How to teach letter location and keyboard awareness:

- Help the child learn letter locations by using flash cards with upper case letters or small words to copy.

- Make it a game by showing the letter and have the child find it — ensure that they are using each hand on each side of the keyboard.

- Make a secret message that your child reads after they have found all the letters or practice spelling words.

- When the child knows the location of most of the keys, cover their hands with paper towel or light piece of cloth then ask them to type simple words without looking at their fingers.

- Put stickers with the home row letters on the student's fingernails, or on the home row to indicate where fingers should be placed.

- Encourage student to rest the thumb on the space bar so they use it to press this key and to avoid lifting and re-setting the hand.

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Progression will happen through use of typing programs and games, and through strategies to promote more efficient keyboard access during computer use. Schedule daily practice time to work on keyboarding skills at home or at school (10 to 15 minutes).

Suggested Free Typing Programs and Games:

The following are a few comprehensive programs that help children learn to type, use proper form, increase their typing speed, and develop good keyboarding habits. There may exist other programs which may be equally helpful. The links should be checked to ensure that the site is still active.

Dance Mat Typing http://www.bbc.co.uk/guides/z3c6tfr	* Interactive and includes animated characters, graphics and sounds * Includes four levels with three stages for each level * Appeals to younger users
Typing Club https://www.typingclub.com/	* Start from the home row and proceed to advanced keyboarding skills * Lessons are not timed, which may be useful for students who experience anxiety * Clean look without a lot of extra colours, animation or clutter
Typing.com www.typing.com	* Includes 45 courses that range in difficulty from beginner to advanced
Keyman https://www.typinggames.zone/keyman	* Tests letters and numbers * Allows player to choose which direction character should move, testing the player's awareness and multitasking skills
Trash Typer https://www.primarygames.com/arcade/virtualworlds/dinokids/games/trashtyper/	* Allows user to type words * Becomes progressively faster and harder
Desert Typing Racer https://www.freetypinggame.net/play14.asp	* Everything from the home row to French words (40 levels) * Three levels of difficulty
Alpha Attack http://www.wordgames.com/en/alpha-attack.html	* Let's one return to advanced levels once completed * Provides multiple difficulty levels

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