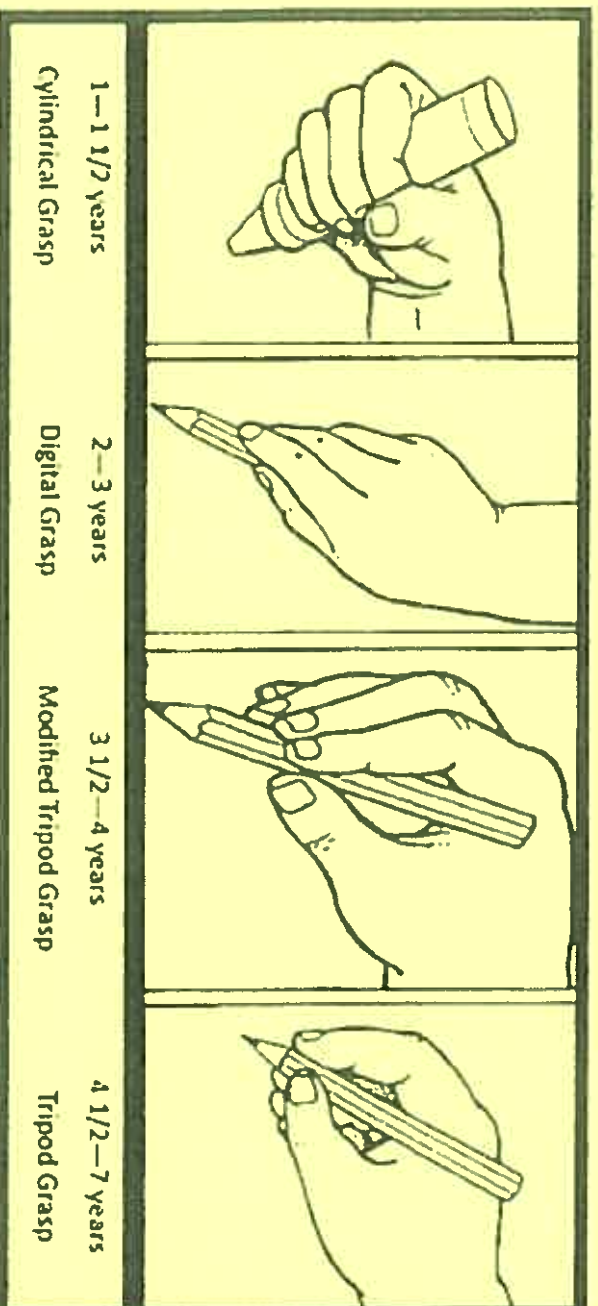


Developing Small Motor Skills and an Efficient Pencil Grip Are Important Parts of Learning How to Write—and Enjoying the Process!

Dear Parents,



Good handwriting matters, beginning with a good pencil grasp!

If handwriting motions are not efficient, it interferes with the whole process.

As your child develops a better pencil grasp, the writing process becomes easier.

(This drawing shows typical progression of preschool development of pencil grasp. We were not able to locate its source.)

Nudging Parents to be Literacy Partners



The study found peer influence among parents increased family participation in the reading challenge. ©Shutterstock/Nowik Sylwia

Most parents know that reading to a child, and listening to them read, is important. For many, the desire and intention is there, but due to the pressures of family, work, and life in general, home reading can drop off the list of things to do, especially as a child moves through primary school.

How can teachers take advantage of a family's knowledge that home reading is important, to prompt more of this behaviour? We sought answers to this question in a study recently published in *Educational Psychology*.

The purpose of the study

We tested a behavioural science strategy that has been used to increase participation in social programs to examine if teachers can effectively urge families to spend time reading at home with their child (Colgate & Ginns, 2016). The results demonstrate that teachers, can with minimal effort and low cost, can 'nudge' more parents to make time for regular home reading.

Based upon the widely accepted idea that individuals are influenced by observing or learning about the behaviour of others, parents were provided with a descriptive norm message. These types of messages provide information regarding socially accepted behaviour; specifically, the most common behaviour for people in a particular situation.

At the launch of the New South Wales Premier's Reading Challenge 2009, parents in Grade 1 classes in two primary schools in Sydney received descriptive norm information that the majority of other families participated in the reading challenge for Grade 1. This intervention was compared to the usual school invitation to participate in the reading challenge, which the control Grade 1

classes received. The parent information given to the intervention group was designed to make parents aware that home reading behaviour was a norm for the majority of families, either at their school or living in their local area.

What did we find?

We found that peer influence among parents increased family participation in the reading challenge. Of the parents who received descriptive norm information, 76 per cent participated in the challenge. This compared to 47 per cent of those in the control group – who received the usual school invitation.

The results indicate that parents can and are influenced by the behaviour of their peers and suggests that the information provided to families can have a socialising affect.

What does this mean for teachers?

Increasing participation: Group behaviour often provides evidence of what is considered to be socially appropriate (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004), and can send a potentially powerful message. Teachers can use participation in school reading challenges and participation in literacy events at the school, such as author visits or parent reading workshops, by simply tracking the numbers attending. This information can then be shared with all families in a school newsletter to show that their school community values these activities and to encourage greater participation.

Similarity and who we identify with matters: Within schools, individual parents will often develop friendships and social relations with other parents; these commonplace social groups are influenced further by the upsurge in social media networks. In particular, it is the behaviour of those we believe are most similar to ourselves, or those who we wish to identify with, that has also been found to be particularly motivating (Cialdini, 2009). Information learnt through these comparisons has been found to impact individual parents' home environments.

Teachers can facilitate opportunities for families to build connections through social network platforms which cater for small private groups. These can be set up to allow parents to share information around literacy, such as engaging books for children of a certain age and knowledge of literacy events taking place in the community. Assisting parents with more opportunity to connect and share in this way not only provides parents with ideas, but can act as a regular reminder for parents of the importance of home reading.

Social reinforcement when norms do not exist: If peoples' behaviour is shaped by the actions of those around them, but it is not the norm for families in a class to engage in home reading, an alternative option for teachers is to share popular opinion as opposed to popular behaviour, or share absolute numbers that suggest popularity (Martin, 2012). For instance, organisations such as Scholastic (Scholastic, 2015) provide research figures regarding families' beliefs around reading, as well as current reading behaviour for larger populations. Teachers can cite these figures, communicating broader opinions and norms.

Alternatively, teachers can share details of the **most popular children's books for a specific age**. This information can be easily found with an online search and is another way of enforcing and

sharing reading norms. Knowledge such as this can be very motivating, it does not require a lot of effort, nor does it require teachers having to provide evidence for their specific classroom, or even their individual school.

The virtuous circle of social belongingness

Social influence can create a type virtuous circle; the more families known to be reading at home with their children, the more likely others will do so too. Leaning on social belongingness is an alternative strategy for teachers to consider when they would like to nudge families to foster home reading and, in doing so, capitalise on shared family literacy opportunities.

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