

Left-handers

Callum: Hello, I'm Callum Robertson and this is Weekender.

Are you, like me, one of the approximately 10% of the world's population who are left-handed? What kinds of problems have you experienced in life?

Those people who are right-handed probably cannot even imagine the inconvenience that many things in everyday life cause to left-handed people.

Here's 17 year old left-hander Tom Milsom. What three things does he describe as causing him problems?

TOM MILSOM

So here we have a typical, ordinary right-handed tin opener and if I try to open the tin, normally I much prefer to hold it in my right hand and turn with my left because that's the strongest way to do it, but with this right-handed one I've got to hold it in my left and turn with my right which I can do but it just feels a whole lot more difficult and well I've pretty much just mangled the tin.

And it's not just in the home where there are problems for left-handers. If you're a commuter and you go to train station the ticket barriers are made for right handers, 'cos if you take your ticket out you've got to put it in on the right hand, for right-handers who hold their ticket in their right hand normally, it's not a problem but for left-handers, they've got to cross their hands over and put it in and it just makes it very awkward, especially if you're holding bags or something, it just gets in the way.

Now what I've got here is a fountain pen, probably the most obvious example of what left handers are not very good with. When you're a left-hander and you start to write with a

fountain pen and you smudge what you're writing as you go across because your hand is following the pen instead of pulling it across the page. So children as they write they tend to curl their hand around so their hand goes above what they're writing and doesn't smudge it, but it had terrible posture.

Callum: Tom talks about problems using tin openers, he has to use his weaker hand to use them, he also mentions ticket barriers at train stations, if you're left-handed you have to cross your hands to put your ticket in. And finally he talks about the difficulty writing with an ink pen, a fountain pen.

Some of these things may not be that difficult to cope with but on a day to day level there are many items that left handers have difficulty with, such as scissors, computer mice, rulers, musical instruments and so on. Here's left handers Elena and Rasha describing another common item that students encounter which they had problems with when studying. What are they talking about.

Elena

When I went to university we had these single desks that you sat on, and there was a little table that came in from the right hand side and so if you're left-handed you can't actually sit properly at the table to write as there's nowhere to rest your hand, rest your arm. So either you have to sit in the chair sideways, to use the table or you have to write with your pad of paper in your lap.

Rasha

The chairs in the exams are just designed for the right-handed people so I had to use two chairs, one to sit on and one to lean on when I'm writing.

Callum: Both had problems with a particular kind of chair for students which has a part for putting their papers on, to lean on and to write on. However these parts are

usually on the right hand side, which makes them very difficult for left-handed students to use.

Although I'm left-handed and have experienced many of these difficulties myself I do think I'm quite lucky. No one has ever tried to make me change. Had I been a few years older then when I was at school I may have been forced to use my right hand and not my left hand. In many countries and cultures left-handedness was seen as being something wrong, something which had to be changed, as Elena and Rasha experienced.

Elena

When I grew up, when it became apparent that I was left handed my grandmother was very against it and so no and always took my pens and crayons out of my left hand. When I Went to school the teachers wouldn't let me use my left hand so I use to always still use my left hand but every time they came near or every time they looked at me I had to swap hands so that they wouldn't catch me.

Callum: These days, certainly in the United Kingdom, teachers don't force children to use their right hands. Being left-handed is not seen as something that is unusual, suspicious or even evil. There are shops where you can buy left-handed products and even a website where teachers can download materials and information on how to teach left-handed pupils to write in a way that doesn't harm their posture. But it's still a world ruled by right handers.

That's all from this edition of Weekender.