

Introduction to fine motor skills



Writing

Cutting

Threading

Painting

Using zips

All children develop their hand function in developmental stages moving from the larger movements to the smaller movements that occur in the hands, wrists and fingers. These smaller actions enable children to be able to effectively engage in functional tasks such as picking up small objects between the thumb and finger; using a pencil to write carefully; holding a fork and using it to eat.

Activity suggestions

- Threading – cube shaped beads, large/small beads, cut up straws, macaroni.
- Construction toys requiring two-handed play e.g. Stickle bricks, Lego or similar.
- Tearing paper of different thicknesses for collage pictures.
- Folding paper to make simple models, paper chains or to fit in an envelope.
- Simple musical instruments, copy / tap out rhythms.
- Use play dough, salt dough/pastry/Plasticine to complete the following:
 - Squeeze tightly in each hand to make fist imprint.
 - Roll between palms to make a ball.
 - Flatten ball with palm pushing down on table.
 - Pinch with thumb and each finger in turn.
 - Roll a sausage as long and thin as possible without breaking, using palm and fingers.
 - Roll small balls between thumb and forefinger.
 - Roll out with rolling pin using two flat hands.
- Jigsaws
- Deal out 'snap' cards or matching pair cards.
- Dot-to-dot pictures and colouring in activities

- Simple mazes – trace the path with the index finger, then complete using a pencil or crayon.
- Pencil trails

In order to become proficient at these sorts of activities, children need good:

- Hand and eye co-ordination
- Finger and hand dexterity

In the sections below, we have provided some additional information on these sub-skills as some extra help in these areas may enable them to master fine motor tasks.

Hand / eye co-ordination
Activity suggestions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bean Bag Games – Throw the bean bag underarm, first forwards then towards a target, for example, into a box or to knock the skittles over. • Ball Games • Roll a ball between two posts (or into a goal). This can be made more difficult by moving the posts closer together. • In pairs, throw the ball to each other. If you drop the ball, go down on one knee. If you catch the ball you can stand up again, but if you drop the ball again, you go down on both knees. Again, if you drop the ball, you sit on your heels. If you drop it again, you go to one hand and then, if you drop it again, you go to no hands and the game starts again. • Play Dough – Roll into snakes and balls on the table and then between two hands. These can be made up into coil pots or thumb pots. • Ball and Cup – Catch the ball in the cup.

Hand and finger dexterity
Dexterity of the hands and fingers are important to enable children to manipulate tools using more refined movements with increasing complexity.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A bandage is laid across a table. The child sits at the table trapping the end of the bandage between the wrist of the “writing” hand and the edge of the table. Using fingers only, the child tries to gather the bandage under the hand. • A bandage is laid along the edge of the table. The “writing” hand is held above one end of the bandage with the wrist resting on the edge of the table. Using fast thumb movements only, the child tries to slide the bandage under the hand until the other end of the bandage is under the thumb. For example, if the right thumb is used, the bandage is moved to the right. • Try to roll bandage up using one hand only on a thigh. • The child sits at a table and tries to move their fingers as if playing fast music on a piano (you could play piano music while this is going on!).

Hand-Grasp Strengthening:

Hand and wrist strengthening is essential for development of the control of fine manipulative tasks.

Try the following:

- Holding onto the ropes of a swing while it is swinging.
- Playing “tug of war.”
- Using scissors to cut through different densities of paper/card.
- Spraying with a trigger type spray bottle.
- Kneading, poking, rolling playdough/pastry.
- Cutting round shapes, letters in playdough/pastry.

Pinch and Pincer Grip

Developing isolation of finger movements with opposition to the thumb is an important prerequisite for pencil control and other fine motor tasks. When encouraging/practicing a pincer grasp it is essential to encourage the child to pinch using the tips of the index finger and thumb, so that the thumb and index finger are curved to create a circle shape i.e. the index finger and thumb should not be straight.

These activities should help to develop pincer skills:

- Tearing paper for collages.
- Roll torn tissue paper into small balls then stick onto paper/card to make collages.
- Picking up small objects such as counters/pennies/beans etc. and placing in jars/containers.
- Popping bubble wrap.
- Threading – using threading cards.
- Playing with an old telephone with a dial; pressing cassette recorder buttons etc.

Dexterity and Use of Tools

A tool is only as accurate as the hands and fingers that control it.

Try the following to help with the use of tools:

- Wrapping a pencil with putty or playdough may help to relax a tense grip.
- Provide opportunities to use a variety of tools.
- Art projects requiring less precise use of pencils and crayons.
- Adult sized pencils and crayons may be easier for little fingers to control.
- Drawing around each other on the floor.