

What to Know & How to Develop Fine Motor Skills

Preschool-School Age Children

Dear Parents and Caregivers,

Fine motor skills involve the use of the fingers, hands, arms, and shoulder for reaching, grasping, and manipulating objects. Fine motor skills are used when a child plays, performs daily self-help tasks, or participates at school as a student.

Just like other areas of development, the ability to successfully use your hands is influenced by active experiences. In other words, in some cases parents may minimize or eliminate future difficulties with fine motor skills by involving their child in activities that are fun while at home!

The Occupational Therapist provided this guide as a tool to learn which activities may benefit your child. These activities are designed to facilitate growth in upper body and arm strength, finger and hand strength, finger isolation, and development of the arches of the hand. It is important to have FUN with these activities by establishing a playful atmosphere during their use.

Enjoy giving your children the tools to help them grow!

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What Parents Need to Know:

- Adequate shoulder and core strength provides the stability that is required for precise and controlled use of the hand.
- Adequate hand and finger strength is required to exert enough force to match the qualities of the object to be grasped and manipulated.
- Without adequate strength, the child will not be able to use the tools and/or objects as required or he/she may fatigue before the task can be completed.
- Well-developed arches of the hand allow the hand to be powerful, yet skillful for isolated finger movements.
- The ability to move each finger individually, or one at a time, is important for precise and careful use of each hand.
- Well-developed controlled finger movements are needed for tasks such as using a pencil, cutting with scissors, manipulating toys, and tying shoelaces.

Your preschool-Kindergarten child should be able to...

- Hold a pencil/crayon/marker in a tripod or quadruped grasp to draw shapes and letters.
 - Tripod grasp- thumb and first finger pinch the pencil, the pencil rests on the side of the middle finger. Thumb and fingers should make an “o” while the ring and pinkie finger rest in palm.
 - Quadruped grasp- thumb, first, and middle fingers pinch the pencil, the pencil rests on the ring finger. Thumb and fingers should make an “o”.
- Draw/color with a utensil using controlled movements of wrist, hand, and fingers.
- Show “separation of hand”- Child should use thumb, pointer, and middle fingers for skilled work and the ring and pinkie fingers rest against the palm to provide stability for the hand.
- Use fingers to hold spoon and fork.
- Touch the tip of each finger to their thumb.
- Use a dominant hand.
- Use classroom utensils with good control (scissors, glue, etc.).
- Open twist off lids.

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Try this for Core and Shoulder strength!

- Wall push-ups- child stands facing the wall about an arm's length away. He/she places both hands on the wall at shoulder height. The child slowly bends elbows to bring his/her upper body toward and then away from the wall. His/her feet remain stationary. Repeat many times.
- Outdoor painting- provide a large paint brush and bucket of water. Allow your child to "paint" outdoor walls, fences, driveway, railing, etc.
- Bounce on a hippity hop ball
- Animal walks- bear crawl, crab walk, army crawl, etc.
- Playground equipment- climb rope ladders and jungle gym equipment.
- Push/pull- a wagon, box, laundry basket full of heavy toys or objects.
- Household chores- carry bags of groceries and put objects away on shelves
- Ball play- throw and catch
- Dig in sand or soil
- Swimming- great exercise to build strength and endurance while having fun!
- On the wall- use an easel or hang paper on the wall for your child to decorate. Use crayons, pencils, paint, markers, chalk, or stickers to produce works of art!
- On the floor- while on his/her belly, child can color, write, watch TV (limited time) do puzzles, etc.

Try this for hand & finger strength, developing arches, and finger isolation!

*Encourage use of the skilled fingers!

- Squeeze- sponges in the sink/tub, stress balls, paper into balls, play-doh, or clay.
- Resistive tools- given help as needed, children enjoy using a hole punch, basting tool, garlic press, and eye dropper
- Spray bottle- fill a small plastic bottle with water and encourage your child to use his/her fingers to squeeze the lever to spray. Great for outdoors and bath tub.
- Flicking games- use index finger to flick a marble, cotton ball, small pom-poms, or balls of paper at a target.
- Hammering- use a toy hammer to pound golf tees into foam blocks.
- Use legos, Duplo, K'nex, Tinker toys, or similar building blocks.
- Clothespins- squeeze onto edge of can, baskets, clothesline, ribbon, etc.
- Use tools to pick up toys and objects- Tweezers and tongs of varying size and resistance can be found at many of the local stores! Just look in the cooking department!
- Play-doh and clay- mold, squeeze, roll, tear, and pinch.
- Use broken crayons to draw/color with- this will 'force' use of skilled fingers!
- Large or small pop beads- assemble and pull apart.
- Folding paper to make a paper airplane or Origami.
- Ripping paper into small pieces for crafts
- Bubbles- pop bubbles with just pointer finger (while other fingers are curled in hand) or just pinkie finger.
- Finger puppets- use one or several at a time.
- Finger painting- use only the pointer finger or thumb to paint.
- Place a different picture sticker on the pad of each finger. Have your child use his/her thumb to touch the sticker that is specified by the parent.
- Got it- child places his/her hand palm down and flat on the table. Parent touches a single finger; the child tries to lift up only that finger.
- Finger games- "Itsy Bitsy Spider" or "Thumbkin"