

Fine Motor Development and Developing Handwriting Skills

Body Stability

The joints of the body need to be stable before the hands can be free to focus on specific skilled fine motor tasks. Good activities to support this include wheelbarrow walking, crab walking, and wall push-ups and monkey bars on the playground. When a certain amount of body stability has developed, the hands and fingers begin to work on movements of dexterity and isolation as well as different kinds of grasps.

Children will develop fine motor skills best when they work on a vertical or near vertical surface as much as possible. In particular, the wrist must be in extension, bent back in the direction of the hand. The benefits for these include: having your child's wrist positioned to develop good thumb movements; they help develop good fine motor muscles; your child is using the arm and shoulder muscles.

Examples of activities to support this are: vertical chalkboards; easels for painting; felt or flannel boards; magnet boards (or fridge); windows and mirrors; white boards, etc. Children can also make sticker pictures; do rubber ink-stamping; use re-useable stickers to make pictures; complete puzzles with thick knobs; use magna-doodle and etch-a-sketch as well.

Attach a large piece of drawing paper to the wall. Draw lines from top to bottom, left to right... Experiment making vertical, horizontal, and parallel lines.

Play connect the dots. Again make sure the child's strokes connect dots from left to right, and from top to bottom.

Trace around stencils - the non-dominant hand should hold the stencil flat and stable against the paper, while the dominant hand pushes the pencil firmly against the edge of the stencil. The stencil must be held firmly.

Attach a large piece of felt to the wall, or use a felt board. The child can use felt shapes to make pictures.

Other Fine Motor Activities

Moulding and rolling play dough into balls - using the palms of the hands facing each other and with fingers curled slightly towards the palm.

Using pegs or toothpicks to make designs in play dough.

Cutting play dough with a plastic knife or with a pizza wheel

Tearing newspaper into strips and then crumpling them into balls. Use to stuff scarecrow or other art creation.

Scrunching up 1 sheet of newspaper in one hand. This is a super strength builder.

Using a plant sprayer to spray plants, (indoors, outdoors) to spray snow (mix food colouring with water so that the snow can be painted), or melt "monsters". (Draw monster pictures with markers and the colours will run when sprayed.)

Picking up objects using large tweezers. This can be adapted by picking up Cheerios, small cubes, small marshmallows, pennies, etc. in counting games.

Shaking dice by cupping the hands together, forming an empty air space between the palms.

Using eye droppers to "pick up" coloured water for colour mixing or to make artistic designs on paper.

Rolling small balls out of tissue paper, then gluing the balls onto construction paper to form pictures or designs.

Turning over cards, coins, or buttons without bringing them to the edge of the table.

Making pictures using stickers or self-sticking paper reinforcements.

Playing games with the "puppet fingers" -the thumb, index, and middle fingers.

Place a variety of forms (eg. blocks, felt, paper, string, yarn, cereal, cotton) on outlines.

Match shapes, colour, or pictures to a page and paste them within the outlines.

Self-Care Skills to aid fine motor and gross motor development

Buttoning

Lacing

Tying

Fastening Snaps

Zippering

Carrying

Using a screwdriver

Locking and unlocking a door

Winding a clock

Opening and closing jars

Rolling out dough or other simple cooking activities

Washing plastic dishes

Sweeping the floor

Dressing

Scissor Activities

When scissors are held correctly, and when they fit a child's hand well, cutting activities will exercise the very same muscles which are needed to manipulate a pencil in a mature tripod grasp. The correct scissor position is with the thumb and middle finger in the handles of the scissors, the index finger on the outside of the handle to stabilize, with fingers four and five curled into the palm.

Cutting junk mail, particularly the kind of paper used in magazine subscription cards.

Making fringe on the edge of a piece of construction paper.

Cutting play dough or clay with scissors.

Cutting straws or shredded paper.

Use a thick black line to guide cutting the following:

A fringe from a piece of paper

Cut off corners of a piece of paper

Cut along curved lines

Cut lines with a variety of angles

Cut figures with curves and angles

Sensory Activities

The following activities ought to be done frequently to increase postural muscle strength and endurance.

These activities also strengthen awareness of hands.

Wheelbarrow walking, crab walking

Clapping games (loud/quiet, on knees together etc.)

Catching (clapping) bubbles between hands

Pulling off pieces of putty with individual fingers and thumb

Drawing in a tactile medium such as wet sand, salt, rice or "gloop". Make "gloop" by adding water to cornstarch until you have a mixture similar in consistency to toothpaste. The "drag" of this mixture provides feedback to the muscle and joint receptors, thus facilitating visual motor control.

Picking out small objects like pegs, beads, coins, etc, from a tray of salt, sand, rice or putty. Try it with eyes closed too. This helps develop sensory awareness in the hands.