

**CARE & LEARNING SERVICE
OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY ADVICE FOR
FINE MOTOR SKILLS**

Introduction:

This booklet is a guide to help you understand more about fine motor skills and how you can support your child to develop them.

It has some suggested activity ideas to help get you started and to think of the types of activities that will be beneficial for your child.

Play:

Play is the main occupation of childhood. It is through play that children learn to explore and to develop new skills.

Adults have a very important role in helping a child to learn to play constructively and to practice new skills.



Fine Motor Skills:

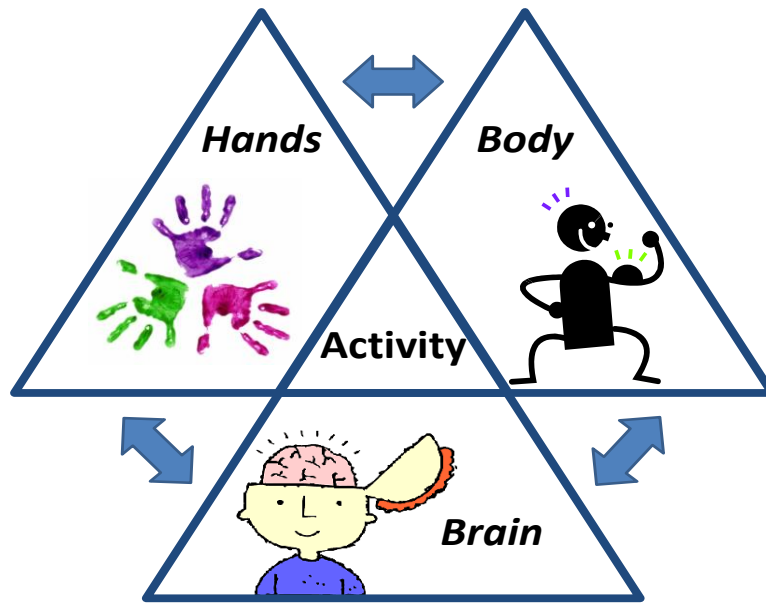
Fine motor skills are the building blocks required to carry out activities that require controlled and precise movements.

Activities that use fine motor skills are self-care tasks such as doing up buttons and using a knife and fork and school tasks such as writing and cutting with scissors.



Activities that improve fine motor skills are ones that allow a child to develop specific aspects of the underlying skills.

THE BUILDING BLOCKS



The Hands:

- Work as a team, with a “doing hand” and a “helping hand” (hand dominance)
- Have strong muscles in the hands and fingers
- Work with precision and control

The Body:

- Maintains a good, steady posture to support the hands
- Has strong muscles, especially in the shoulders and tummy
- Has “staying power” (stamina/endurance)

The Brain:

- Concentrates on an activity
- Comes up with a plan and passes this on to the body
- Checks to see if the plan worked
- Problem solves if the plan did not work
- Stores all this information so it can be used next time

HOW TO SET YOUR CHILD UP FOR SUCCESS

- Before you start: think about the best place to do the activity, eg on the floor, at a table.
- Give clear expectations and boundaries so children know what is and is not expected of them.



- **Posture:** when sitting at a table, make sure your child's feet are on the floor as this helps them to balance
- Use your child's interests to guide the activities
- Get family and friends involved in the activities. This will make it more fun
- Give lots of **encouragement**
- Give specific praise, eg "Wow, what great sitting"
- Allow time for **repetition and practice**
- If a child finds it difficult on the first attempt, make the task simpler and then build it up
- For an activity to be successful it has to be **enjoyable** for everyone (this includes you!)
- Allow movement breaks
- Aim for **quality not quantity**



COACHING TIPS

- **Hand over hand guidance:** place your hand on your child's hand to give them a physical cue as to what to do
- **Demonstration:** show your child what to do and talk through the steps
- **Backward chaining:** let your child do the last step of a task, once they have mastered this, add on the step before and so on until they can do the whole task
- **Trial and error learning:** allow your child to make mistakes and support them to think through how they could do it differently next time
- **"Helping" hand and "doing" hand:** encourage one hand to take the lead (dominant hand) and the other to take a supporting role.

GRASPS

The way you hold something impacts on the amount of control you have. If all your fingers are “fighting” to do a job, then you have less chance of being successful.

Two important grasps to encourage are:

Tripod: Thumb, index finger and middle finger; this grip is really good for manipulation, eg using a pencil, tying shoelaces



Pincer: Thumb and index finger; this grip is really good for picking up small things, eg raisins, counters

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What can I do to help develop my child's pincer/tripod grasp?



Encourage your child to tuck away the other fingers. It may help to give them something small to hold in the palm of their hand. This acts as a pillow for the “sleepy” fingers, whilst the “busy” fingers get to work!

How often should we carry out activities?

The key is little and often. It will depend on your schedule, but 20 minutes, 5 times a week would be ideal. It does not have to be activities from this booklet, any activity that gets the fingers moving will do!

How long should I keep going for?

Keep going! Children's skills constantly develop so supporting their development is an ongoing process. Try to make it part of your day-to-day routine rather than seeing it as a separate activity programme.

How many activities should we complete?

Aim for quality not quantity. It is better to do 2 activities well rather than rushing through 10. Also, it is best to end before boredom kicks in to leave your child wanting to play again another day.

Is there anything else I can do?

Make sure that you carry out activities that build up your child's overall strength and stamina. Going to the playpark, ball games, swimming, etc.

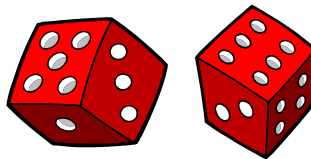


BOX OF TOYS

You may find it useful to have toys and activities handy in a plastic box. They are then ready to be taken out where there is an opportunity to play.

Here is a list of suggested items for your box:

- Building blocks, eg Duplo/Lego
- Large and small threading beads
- Hama beads
- Play-dough
- Animal fun pegs
- Tennis ball
- Tweezers or small tongs
- Plastic straws (cut in half)
- Small items to pick up
- Small pom-poms
- Counters or coins
- Wind up toys
- Board game with a dice
- Playing games with small pieces, eg travel games
- Card games, eg snap, matching pairs
- Various craft items; coloured paper, card, tissue paper, stickers, ink stampers and ink pad
- Small squeezable paint and glue bottles
- Cotton buds



Some of the smaller items can be stored in small plastic jars, containers or pencil cases.

You could use this as a chance to practice screwing lids, opening containers and doing zips.

STRENGTHENING ACTIVITIES

Strengthening activities are ones where the muscles in the hands and fingers have to work against resistance or some weight.

Squashing and Squeezing

Whole Hand: Popping bubble wrap, play-dough, paint and glue in squeeze bottles, stress balls

Pincer/Tripod: Bubble wrap - one pop at a time, small spray bottles/water gun, picking up items with tongs/tweezers



Pushing and Pulling



Whole Hand: Tug-of-war, hole punchers, shape cutters, balloon pump, hammering, large interlocking toys, eg Duplo

Pincer/Tripod: Tearing strips of paper, finding small items hidden in play-dough, small interlocking toys, eg Lego, Stickle-Bricks

Kneading and Rolling

Either using your hands or a rolling pin; this works great as part of pretend cooking, eg making a pizza base out of Playdoh.

Freeze Position (Balance)

Whole Hand: Cup your hands and stretch them out in front of you, get someone to put items in to you hands and see how long you can hold them for.

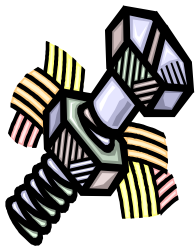
Pincer/Tripod: Fill a small container with water/rice, hold upright in the tips of fingers – try not to spill!



SKILL BUILDER ACTIVITIES

In each hand, there are 34 muscles that are used to move the thumb and fingers. The brain has to learn to tell them to move in a certain order and pattern to carry out specific tasks.

Rotating/Turning



Nuts and Bolts: Threading the nuts on/off bolts

Screwing Lids: On and off containers/jars; these could have surprises or toys inside them

Twisting Toys: Spinning tops, wind-up toys

Hand-Eye Co-Ordination

Threading and Lacing: Try sewing, lacing cards and making necklaces. Start with big holes, then try smaller ones

Finger Football: Get a small ball (or make one, eg Blue-tac) and flick it into a goal using individual fingers, it helps to support your wrist on the table



Arts and Crafts: Peeling and placing stickers, ink stampers (or make your own out of potatoes)

Precision and Control



Finger Puppets: Either one finger or multiple fingers

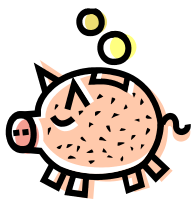
Off the Shelf: Games that have small pieces, cards or dice, such as Connect 4, Snap, Snakes and Ladders

Ball Walk: Use your fingers to walk a small ball around a table-top obstacle course

SPEED ACTIVITIES

Speed activities help skills to become automatic as you get lots of practice and as you get faster you have less and less time to think in advance. A lot of “normal” activities can be turned into fun games by adding a speed challenge.

Money box



- See how quickly you can put a stack of coins in to a money box.
- To make it harder, have the child hold some coins in their hand and move them up to their fingers tips before they post them.

Animal Race

- Tie one end of a piece of string to a plastic toy animal, on the other end tie a dowel or thick pen.
- Place the toy on a table and race to see who can wind in their toy first.

Coin/Card Flip

- Line some up on a table and see how quickly you can turn/flip them over.
- Start of with just a few then increase the number to make it harder or move them around so they are harder to reach.



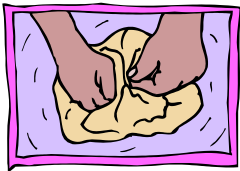
Peg Race



- Start with some pegs inside a container then see how fast you can clip them all on the outside rim using one hand.
- Swap over and try the other hand.
- Novelty pegs can make this more fun.

AROUND THE HOME

Sometimes it can be hard to dedicate a specific time to play. However, there are plenty of activities around the home that can be made in to a fun way to develop fine motor skills.



Kitchen: Cooking can provide a great opportunity to work on strengthening skills, such as stirring mixture, kneading dough or squeezing oranges.

Housework: Pegging the washing allows children to work on their tripod grasp when squeezing the pegs open. Pegs could also be used to pick up items off the floor, like crumpled paper or socks.

Gardening: Use spray bottles filled with water. Make sure that a small sized bottle is used and has an easy to operate trigger. Spray the flowers, seeds, spray or onto a wall/paving slabs to make fun shapes.



Let your child play with compost and help plant bulbs and seeds, the smaller the item the more control it will require.



Bath-time: Squeezing out sponges and facecloths, popping bubbles or toys that squirt water/need winding up are a great way of making the bath fun as well as working on fine motor skills.

USEFUL RESOURCES

Shops:

- Pound Shops: have lots of arts and crafts activities
- Supermarkets: often have lots of games on offer and other items for your box, such as straws and pegs
- Hobbycraft: is at Inshes Retail Park, Inverness and has loads of craft materials and ideas; the staff are really helpful
- Baker Ross: is great for arts and crafts ideas and resources
Tel: 0844 576 8922 www.bakerross.co.uk

Websites:

There are thousands of resources on the internet. Using a search engine such as Google, type in key words, eg fine motor games, threading activities, hand strengthening activities

Here are some to get you going:

www.prekinders.com/fine-motor
www.activityvillage.co.uk
www.dltk-kids.com
www.mamaot.com
www.learning4kids.net

Books:

Activities for Fine Motor Skills Development Grd Prek-1 by J L Smith
available through Amazon

The Little Book of Fine Motor Skills by S Featherstone
available through Amazon