

Activities to Promote Fine Motor Skill Development

Fine motor skills, are responsible for coordinating precise and small movements in the hand, and fingers. Examples of activities that require fine motor control include handwriting, drawing, grasping small objects, manipulating fasteners such as buttons and zippers, cutting and computer use (using the mouse and keyboarding). Fine motor skills begin developing from infancy. It is important to keep in mind that it is important to focus on using manipulatives for children under the age of 4-year-old in order to develop handwriting readiness rather than spending time with writing utensils. Hand dominance is generally established by the age of six.

Activities to promote postural control and proximal stability

To promote good fine motor skills, postural control and proximal stability are important to develop in order to provide a foundation for continued development of fine motor skills. Postural control and postural stability refer to a child's ability to maintain and change position of the trunk, neck and head. By developing the strength and coordination in these muscle areas, it allows children to maintain an upright posture for an activity that requires the child to use his or her arms and hands. Proximal stability is required to allow a child to develop more distal control which contributes to smooth movements of arms and hands.

- Write on vertical surfaces such as a wall or easel instead of writing at a table or desk
- Play games on uneven surfaces on knees such as playing balloon toss on a pile of pillows or couch cushions
- Sit on a large exercise/yoga ball when watching TV, playing video games or while sitting at the table for homework or fine motor activities
- Sit on exercise/yoga ball and pick up tennis balls, bean bags, or small stuffed animals from the ground and throw at a target. Increase the challenge by varying the placement of the objects such as placing them at different heights and placing them toward the front and back of the ball to increase trunk rotation.
- Play games outside that require balancing on one leg or jumping with two feet together such as hopscotch, jumping in and out of "hoola hoops" and /or jumping over ropes.
- Do wheelbarrow walks (child supports self on hands while adult lifts legs off ground in order for child to walk forward on hands).
- Have fun walking like animals such as crabs, monkeys, bears and elephants.
- Encourage child to sit with legs in a criss-cross pattern with his or her legs folded in front. Avoid allowing the child to sit in a "W" pattern with knees in front and feet in back.

Activities to promote functional hand and finger position:

Use a vertical surface to help to develop wrist extension which will help to facilitate using the fine motor muscles in the hand.

Vertical surfaces help to place a child's wrist in an optimal position to promote further fine motor development especially during handwriting activities.

- Have child hold paper up on the wall to color, trace or draw. Textured paper (i.e., sand paper, corrugated cardboard, natural items such as large leaves, etc.) can also be used under the paper to provide more tactile feedback. This also promotes using both hands together for improved bilateral coordination.
- Clip paper to an easel when copying spelling words, copying simple drawings or coloring.
- Complete mazes while holding it up on the wall with non-dominant hand.
- Place coloring or writing paper on top of a 3-inch binder to facilitate proper wrist extension and position.
- Place stickers onto a piece of paper or to fill in parts of a coloring page taped onto the wall or a vertical surface. This encourages good finger isolation and wrist position.

Fine Motor and Hand Strengthening Activities:

Fine motor skills and hand strength are foundational skills required for performing functional tasks such as handwriting and self-care activities. Incorporating fun activities into a child's day can help to promote the development of these skills.

- Roll play dough using both hands into a snake. Pinch the snake by using thumb and index finger down the length of the snake. Repeat using thumb and middle finger, thumb and ring finger and thumb and little finger.
- Roll play dough into a ball. Hide treasures in the dough (i.e., small buttons, beads, small pegs, etc.). Have child find the treasures with eyes opened and eyes closed.
- Roll play dough into small balls using thumb, index, and middle fingers only. Encourage child to only use the tips of the fingers. After rolling each ball, squeeze each ball using the tips of the index finger and thumb and middle finger and thumb to make mini pancakes.
- Use a garlic press to push play dough through the holes in order to make hair, snakes, worms, noodles, spaghetti etc.
- Flatten out a piece of play dough or sculpting clay approximately 1/2 inch thick. Use a dull pencil or golf tee to draw or write in play dough. This provides resistance for increased hand and finger strength.
- Roll dough into snakes and cut with plastic knife or plastic scissors.
- Pretend to cut dough using fingers as a "scissor" alternating fingers used.
- Cut slits a little smaller than each size coin on a coffee can lid or soft plastic lid from a plastic container, a little smaller than each sized coin. Have child make the OK sign and place the coin between fingers. Have child push the coins through the resistive slots using thumb and index finger.

- Use clothespins to clip items on a thin rope, thick string or edge of a shoe box. Use different clips that provide varied amounts of resistance. Chip clips, wooden clothespins and plastic clothespins can be used. Change the height and angle of the rope or shoe box in increase the challenge.
- Crumple paper using one hand only and use it to make baskets into a bucket or trashcan. Old magazines work well because it does not leave ink on the child's hands. Make sure that the child does not support the hand or paper on body.
- Pick up small objects such as small game pieces, pom-pom balls, or cotton balls using clothespins and/or various sized tweezers and place into cup or container.
- Make an art project by picking up crumbles tissue paper with clothespins or tweezers, dip in glue, and place on picture or coloring page.
- Use tweezers or clothespins to move pieces on a board game.
- Pick up small objects with finger and thumb and put them into container with a small opening such as a water bottle. To increase the challenge, have child hold several objects in the palm of hand. Try to translate one object from the palm of the hand to fingertips then place into bottle or container. Increase amount of small objects held in palm of hand to increase difficulty.
- Use squirt bottles or squirt toys to water outdoor and indoor plants. Write name or draw pictures on sidewalk using outdoor sidewalk chalk and "erase" drawings by squirting water on them.
- String beads, cheerios, or macaroni on a string to make a necklace or bracelet.
- Tear tissue paper into strips or small pieces and glue onto coloring paper to fill in parts of the pictures.
- Use different types of media during writing tasks by using different writing surfaces (i.e., corrugated cardboard, sand paper, craft foam paper). Write or draw letters and shapes in a tray of sand to salt, soap foam, shaving cream or finger paint. Chalkboards, magnetic writing boards, and dry erase boards can also be used to provide different writing surfaces and to increase interest in writing and drawing activities.
- When using a writing utensil, hold a cotton ball in palm by holding it down by ring and little finger to help isolate the thumb, index and second fingers.
- Use small pieces of chalk or crayons (approximately 1-1.5 inches long) while writing or coloring. This helps to position the fingers in a tripod grip. Using small crayons helps to extinguish using a gross grasp. This strategy is very effective to promote a functional tripod grip.

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