



Developing Fine Motor Skills

Fine Motor skills refer to our ability to control our arms and hands in order to handle objects with precision and use tools such as a pencils, crayons and scissors. Handling of objects or toys requires strength as well as coordination and control. Here are a few things that will help with the development of fine motor skills.

Correct Sitting posture

The size of the chair and table can be crucial, especially for children who have difficulty with motor control. The correct size of chair should allow the child to sit with their bottoms to the back of the chair while their heels remain on the floor. If they are up on tip toes or their feet are dangling, the chair is too high for them. If their knees are significantly higher than their hips, the chair is too small. The table height will need to be compatible to the chair height. The height of the table should be 2" (5 cm) above the child's bent elbow when the child is seated squarely on the chair. If the table is significantly higher, you may need to raise the chair with chair risers although you will then need to use a foot box to support the feet.



Good Core Stability

The muscles around the hips, shoulders and trunk work together to form a child's core stability. It is essential to have a strong middle or core so that we can maintain a good posture against gravity e.g. in sitting and use our arms and hands for more precise movements. Activities to work on trunk stability have been included in the gross motor section, however, below are some ideas to address shoulder stability. This is by no means exhaustive and just as a guide.

Activities to help build up shoulder stability include:

- Art work on an easel or paper covered wall or fridge. You can incorporate a variety of play positions into this activity i.e. standing at the wall, kneeling at the easel, lying on tummy while colouring or painting a large piece of paper as this encourages shoulder movements rather than just forearm movements.
- Painting a wall outside with water and a large decorators paintbrush
- Climbing on apparatus or playground equipment
- Carrying objects such as play crates of toys, an armful of books, moving a chair from one area of the classroom to another, a carrier bag of shopping etc
- Crawling on the floor in games
- Overhead throwing of a large ball i.e. football size with 2 hands or a tennis ball with one hand
- Hoop games: the child has to pass a hula hoop over their head and down their body.
- Parachute games – the raising of the parachute above shoulder height
- Tug of war
- Swimming

Development of muscles and movement patterns in the hand

A child needs to develop separation of their hand where the little and ring fingers curl into the palm of the hand and the middle and index fingers and thumbs are the working side of the hand. Sometimes getting the child to hold a coin with the ring and little finger can help this.

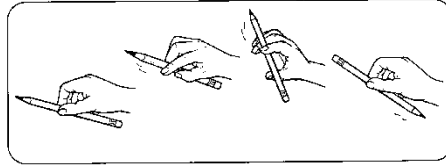
Activities that help develop the hand muscles and develop mature movement patterns in the hand:

- Card Pull: Hold card between finger and thumb (finger on top surface) and pull out from opponent's finger and thumb. Work through each finger.
- Clothes Pegs: Place pegs around dish/box using one finger and thumb. Work through each finger in turn and both hands. Ensure one hand is holding the box steady.
- Peg Board: Insert 20 pegs into board and pull out using the first three fingers of your dominant hand, making sure the non-dominant hand is consistently supporting the board.
- Penny slot: Using one hand only, take pennies out of change purse one at a time and hold them in your palm. Move them out to finger tips one at a time to place in a money box
- Beads: Holding small beads in one hand while threading them onto a string. The size of the child's hand will dictate the size and number of objects the child can manage.
- Lid Twist: Opening a jar or bottle using fingers and thumb. You can use a flip top container (like the mini M&M sweets) or little mint dispensers. Don't let them cheat and hold it against their body!

Pencil Moves:

Hold the pencil ready to write. Hide other hand behind back. Walk fingers up to the other end of the pencil. Then turn the pencil around in the hand so they are holding the other end. This works well with crayola shaders that have two ends.

Hold pencil in air and turn it using fingers to make a helicopter. Turn 5 times one direction, then 5 times the other direction. If easily able to turn, try turning only using tips of thumb, index and middle finger.



- The child can also practice holding a coin with their little and ring fingers while holding a pencil and writing.
- Play dough is fantastic. Try roll small balls with thumb, index and middle fingers and squeeze until fingers meet, push flat into a pancake or roll with a rolling pin
- There is lots you can do with paper too. Tearing to make a collage, punching holes in paper or crumpling into small pieces
- Baggie sealing: Seal zip lock bags using thumb and index finger

Development of pre-writing skills using sensory play

Drawing does not have to be pen and paper. Children learn best through a multi-sensory approach and having an opportunity to explore a variety of movements and texture. Children start with big movements before they go to smaller, more refined movements. Here are a few ideas of how to develop drawing and pre-writing through sensory play:

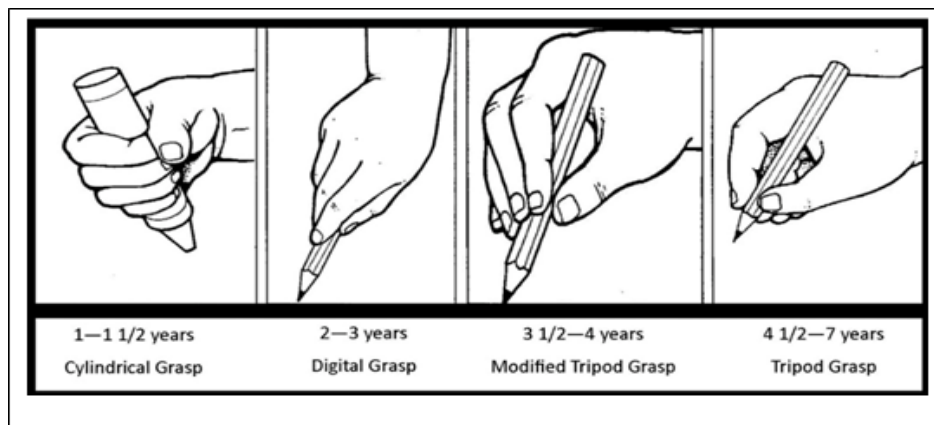
- Art - Making lines and shapes out of play dough, sticks or other material.
- Feely Drawing - practice drawing lines and shapes in different textures e.g. shaving cream, wet sands, rice, finger paints
- Drawing – Let the child draw on a large piece of paper, using different coloured pens and pencils to make the picture bright and cheerful. Working on the chalk board can also be fun.
- Paint with water on the fence, outside wall or pavement
- Using icing to draw on biscuits or a cake

Things to remember when addressing handwriting skills:

Learning to write is a very complex task. It requires the ability to use the hand muscles to grasp and control an object, the ability to use the two hands together, the co-ordination of eye and hand movement, the development of visual perception and the exposure to sensory and movement experiences.

Only once a child is able to draw the basic pre-writing shapes (I – O + / \ X) are they ready to learn how to form letters.

Pencil grasp develops from a basic cylindrical grasp with movement from the shoulder and arm to move the pencil to the tripod grasp, where the movement comes from the fingers.



All children develop at their own pace and it is often in line with their cognitive development.

When working with your child on any of these skill, always remember to have **Fun**.