

Children and Young People's
Occupational Therapy Service



Occupational Therapy

Fine motor skills




EAST AYRSHIRE
**Health & Social Care
Partnership**




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Introduction

This booklet has been designed to provide practical ideas and activities to help support your child/young person to develop their fine motor skills. All references to child/children mean either a child or young person.

Fine motor skills (or manual dexterity) are the coordination of small muscles and movements, involving the hands and fingers. Participation in tasks or games that your child enjoys should be encouraged to build these skills, such as:

- pencil activities
- colouring
- board games
- arts and crafts
- household chores



Fine motor skills can be challenging for many children for a number of reasons:

- Lack of experience or practice
- Excessive use of tablets and other electronic devices
- Difficulty using two sides of the body together (bilateral integration)
- Reduced balance caused by poor core stability

- Difficulty planning and organising themselves to follow instructions
- Poor spatial (space) awareness skills

In many cases, supporting your child on a regular basis to practice fine motor activities should help their skills to improve.

Encouraging the development of fine motor skills within a fun environment will be helpful for your child. Give your child plenty of time to practice the skills by themselves on a daily basis. This is key to learning any skill. Fine motor skills will develop with time and practice.

This booklet provides you with a range of activities and resources across age ranges to help your child develop their fine motor skills.

There are lots of games and activities that you can do to help your child develop their fine motor skills. The list below will provide you with some ideas that you and your child can talk about and decide which ones to do.

Many of the activities not only help fine motor skills. They also help with other important skills such as:

- Planning and organisation
- Turn taking
- Communication
- Problem solving

Action Songs/Rhymes

- Incy wincy spider
- Twinkle twinkle
- The wheels on the bus
- Round and round the garden
- This little piggy



Arts and Crafts

- Finger painting
- Cut up paper/card to make a collage
- Draw a picture and glue/stick on different items, such as raisins for eyes, spaghetti for hair and so on
- Use beads or pasta to make bracelets or necklaces
- Origami (paper folding)
- Use clay/Playdoh to build models or try shaker maker models.
- Use scissors a stapler or a hole punch as part of craft activities.
- Foil art
- Sequin art
- Mosaic craft



Construction

- Building blocks, for example, duplo, lego
- or stickle bricks
- Pipe cleaner models
- Plasticine/playdoh/clay
- Mechano
- K-nex



Games/Activities

- Bubbles. Blow bubbles and then pop them using different fingers
- Finger puppets
- Piggy bank. Put coins into piggy bank, taking them out to count and putting them back in again
- Operation
- Jenga
- Hungry hippos
- Foosball
- Marble run
- Pop up pirate
- Playdoh charades
- Battle ships



- Kerplunk
- Guess who
- Buzz off
- Screwball scramble
- Connect 4
- Penguin pile up
- Smashed potatoes
- Doggie doo
- Card games such as, snap, pairs, clock patience or solitaire
- Lego



Pencil Play

- Mazes
- Dot to dots
- Rubbings using crayons or pencils to make images of coins, leaves or bark
- Colouring in sheets/books
- Drawing and scribbling
- Chalk on blackboard or pavement/ground
- Bath crayons
- Writing a diary or story



Puzzles

- Jigsaws
- Rubik's cube
- Insert boards



Household chores

- Baking. For example, making cupcakes and decorating them
- Helping with food preparation For example, making a sandwich, cutting fruit or vegetables
- Setting the table
- Dialling the number on the phone. For example, to call relative or friend
- Helping to turn the dial on the washing machine or tumble drier
- Opening food packets or containers For example, to feed a pet
- Water indoor plants using a water spray
- Hanging clothes on the washing line using the spring pegs
- Washing the dishes
- Turning the pages of a book, magazine or newspaper

Musical instruments

- Keyboard
- Recorder
- Drums
- Guitar
- Percussion instruments. For example, shakers or tambourines



Other activity ideas

- Preparing school bag for next day. For example, sharpening pencils
- Collect stickers and put them into a sticker album
- Dressing up toys, dolls and teddies, include clothes with fastening (buttons/poppers/zips)
- Practicing touch typing skills on a keyboard
- Crazy soap. Use crazy soap in the bath or on a tray to draw pictures using fingers
- Online craft ideas from websites such as cbeebies; sparklebox; activity village; nickelodeon

Pencil and Scissor Skills

Consider posture and how the child is sitting before the task begins. A good sitting posture for fine motor activities is:

- Check that the child is sitting appropriately, for example, with feet flat on the floor and hips, knees and ankles at 90° angle
- The table should be at a comfortable height

It may be easier for your child to lie on their tummy or to stand to complete pencil activities rather than seated at a table.

Pencil Grip

Children start making marks on a paper around 12 months of age. They will then begin to develop further control and



better grasp of the pencil or crayon. Encouraging your child to hold the pencil or crayon correctly early on, will help to reduce difficulties in the long term. Not every child will develop a correct tripod grasp. Some adapted other grasps can also be useful. Trying a lot of different pencils can improve grip and help improve pencil control.

- Increase the barrel size of the pencil, in order to help grasp and control. For example, chunky pencils, tripod shaped pencils
- Add pencil grips; these are moulded to help with finger positioning for a better grip

- The stabilo easiergo pencils and pens, provide a moulded grip. These are available for use in left hand
- Try a range of pens, such as berol, with darker coloured inks
- Try different nibs and types of pens, to help flow of finger movements. For example, gel, roller ball, fine finger-tip pens, ball point pens

Hand Dominance (preferred hand to write with)



Hand dominance is usually established between three to five years of age. After the age of five you should encourage your child to use the same hand for writing tasks. The other hand can be used in a more supportive role. This will help your child to learn to write more quickly.

Some ways and suggestions to determine and establish hand dominance include:

- Offer items to your child in the midline of their body, and then check whether one hand is used more often than the other for reaching out and grasping.
- Consider which hand is used for the more autonomic actions, for example, using a brush or touching their nose or hair.



- Once a dominant hand is found and the child is five years or older, ensure they always use that hand for pencil skills; the other hand should be used in a more supportive role (holding the page).
- If your child complains about tiredness, let them rest or stretch the writing hand before continuing, rather than allowing them to swap hands.

Scissors skills

- Some children may not have developed the ability to keep the last two fingers tucked in the palm, while the others open and close the scissors. If this is the case, try scissors that have a larger loop and encourage them to place all the fingers in the lower handle to help with control of movements.
- Choose scissors that have larger finger loops or rubber loops, such as Peta or toddler scissors.
- There are many types of scissors on the market (right handed, left handed, looped double handles, spring-loaded, non-loop). It may be worth trying a few different types and watch you child to see if they make a difference. Talk to your child about which scissors they like to use; this will make sure they use them safely.



- Teach your child that the slower they open and close the blade, the more control they will have over their cutting.
- Check that your child has the blade fully open before trying to move the scissors forward.
- When cutting different angles, teach your child to use short snips for more accuracy.
- With straight angles, ask your child to stop cutting before moving the page to help with the change of direction.
- Use a mix of textures and thickness of materials for cutting practice. For example aluminium foil, wax paper, thick brown paper bags, sugar paper, cards, fabric or string.
- Start with cutting thinner card paper, for example cereal boxes, as this may be easier than normal paper.
- Make collages, as this gives the opportunity for cutting pieces of different materials less accurately.
- For children who find grasping paper difficult, use a large paper clip (bulldog clip) and attach it to the paper, to give them something easier to hold.
- For children who are left handed, use left handed scissors to teach your child to cut out shapes in a clockwise direction.



- For children who have limited or no functional use of one hand, use a paper clamp to hold paper in place.
- Cutting sheets resources are available from a variety of websites.

Motivation to practice and build up new skills can be very difficult. Low confidence and low self-esteem can lead to problems when trying to learn something on their own.

It may be helpful to break activities into smaller parts. Encourage independence in each part before moving on. Children learn new skills easier by copying others (modelling). Give praise at every effort to help build confidence. Have fun while you are learning new skills.

Remember...

- Regular practice (five to ten minutes each day) will help your child improve their skills.
- Encourage your child by giving praise for their efforts and success.
- Start easy and slowly make tasks more difficult.
- Make it fun!!!



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