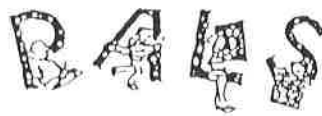




## Fine Motor Activities

The following is a list of suggested activities to improve fine muscle skills and develop finger dexterity and strength. The activities are fun and the other children will enjoy them and unknowingly improve their fine motor skills.

1. Put glue on the child's fingers and encourage them to push their fingers to their thumb individually and pull them apart or push the fingers on both hands together and pull apart one at a time.
2. Any type of play-dough or modeling clay can be used for pushing, pulling, mashing, squeezing. A metal garlic press is a fun way to squeeze play-dough into small pieces.
3. Activities involving taffy or licorice sticks where the child has to pull pieces off before they get to eat them.
4. Gak, slimy balls, or similar type products found at Wal-Mart, also encourage children to explore the toy actively-with their fingers.
5. Sponge type balls made of soft rubber or foam rubber are good for squeezing to deflate and then slowly allowing the ball to inflate.
6. Clothes pins are sometimes difficult to squeeze to open are a good way to develop strength in the fingers. The clothes pins can be used to hang something from a rope. You can also take paper plates and write number one in the middle of the plate and on the edge make a mark for one clothes pin, then do the same thing on other plates with numbers going from 1-10. Then let children put the amount of clothes pins on the plate with the corresponding number.
7. Any type of tongs can be used to pick up objects and place them in specific containers.
8. Using scissors to cut paper, cloth, cardboard, small branches will allow for fun activities and builds strength.
9. A hole punch can be used with one paper or with a small stack of papers, 3 or 4 pieces, to make the activity more difficult.
10. Finger painting, shaving cream, whipped cream, and pudding are all fun ways to actively use the fingers.



# ~~Activities with Fine Motor Manipulatives~~

Pre-kindergartners benefit from experiences that support the development of fine motor skills in the hands and fingers. Children should have strength and dexterity in their hands and fingers before being asked to manipulate a pencil on paper. Working on dexterity and strength first can eliminate the development of an inappropriate pencil grasp, which is becoming more commonplace as young children are engaged in writing experiences before their hands are ready. The following activities involve the use of manipulatives which will support young children's fine motor development, and will help to build the strength and dexterity necessary to hold a pencil appropriately.

## Fine Motor Activities

- Molding and rolling play dough into balls - using the palms of the hands facing each other and with fingers curled slightly towards the palm.
- Rolling play dough into tiny balls (peas) using only the finger tips.
- Using pegs or toothpicks to make designs in play dough.
- Cutting play dough with a plastic knife or with a pizza wheel by holding the implement in a diagonal volar grasp. (see attached diagram)
- 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 coloring with water so that the snow can be painted), or melt "monsters". (Draw monster pictures with markers and the colors will run when sprayed.)
- Picking up objects using large tweezers such as those found in the "Bedbugs" game. 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 small-sized screwdrivers like those found in an erector set.
- Lacing and sewing activities such as stringing beads, Cheerios, macaroni, etc.
- Using eye droppers to "pick up" colored water for color mixing or to make artistic designs on paper.
- Rolling small balls out of tissue paper, and then gluing the balls onto construction paper to form pictures or designs.
- Turning over cards, coins, checkers, 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. At circle time have each child's puppet fingers tell about what happened over the weekend, or use them in songs and finger plays.

## 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 with scissors.
- Cutting straws or shredded paper.

## Sensory Activities

The following activities ought to be done frequently to increase postural muscle strength and endurance. These activities also strengthen the child's awareness of his/her hands.

- Wheelbarrow walking, crab walking
- Clapping games (loud/quiet, on knees together, etc.)
- Catching (clapping) bubbles between hands
- Pulling off pieces of thera-putty with individual fingers and thumb
- Drawing in a tactile medium such as wet sand, salt, rice, or "goop". Make "goop" 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.

## Midline Crossing

Establishment of hand dominance is still developing at this point. The following activities will facilitate midline crossing:

- Encourage reaching across the body for materials with each hand. It may be necessary to engage the other hand in an activity to prevent switching hands at midline.
- Refrain specifically from discouraging a child from using the left hand for any activity. Allow for the natural development of hand dominance by presenting activities at midline, and allowing the child to choose freely.
- Start making the child aware of the left and right sides of his body through spontaneous comments like, "kick the ball with your right leg." Play imitation posture games like "Simon Says" with across the body movements.
- When painting at easel, encourage the child to paint a continuous line across the entire paper- also from diagonal to diagonal.

## Activities To Develop Handwriting Skills

There are significant prerequisites for printing skills that begin in infancy and continue to emerge through the preschool years. The following activities support and promote fine motor and visual motor development:

### 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.

- Wheelbarrow walking, crabs walking, and wall push-ups.
- Toys: Orbiter, silly putty, and monkey bars on the playground.

## Fine Motor Skills

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)

- Attach a large piece of drawing paper to the wall. Have the child use a large marker and try the following exercises to develop visual motor skills: Make an outline of a one at a time. Have the child trace over your line from left to right, or from top to bottom. Trace each figure at least 10 times. Then have the child draw the figure next to your model several times.
- 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. Magnetic boards can be used the same way.
- Have the child work on a chalkboard, using chalk instead of a marker. Do the same kinds of tracing and modeling activities as suggested above.
- Paint at an easel. Some of the modeling activities as suggested above can be done at the easel.
- Magna Doodle- turn it upside down so that the erasing lever is on the top. Experiment making vertical, horizontal, and parallel lines.

## Ocular Motor Control

This refers to the ability of the eyes to work together to follow and hold an object in the line of vision as needed.

- Use a flashlight against the ceiling. Have the child lie on his/her back or tummy and visually follow the moving light from left to right, top to bottom, and diagonally.
- Find hidden pictures in books. (There are special books for this.)
- Maze activities.

## Eye-hand Coordination

This involves accuracy in placement, direction, and spatial awareness.

- Throw bean bags/koosh balls into a hula hoop placed flat on the floor. Gradually increase the distance.
- Play throw and catch with a ball. Start with a large ball and work toward a smaller ball. (Koosh balls are easier to catch than a tennis ball.)
- Practice hitting bowling pins with a ball. (You can purchase these games or make your own with soda bottles and a small ball.)
- Play "Hit the Balloon" with a medium-sized balloon.

## Pre-writing skills for children under 5

*All too often young children are given writing tools to use before they are ready for them. Young children from three to five years of age use their hands to explore and learn about the environment and themselves. By developing good hand skills and other pre-writing skills you will prepare your child for the next step, which is writing. Working on hand skills will also assist older children who are experiencing writing difficulties.*

### What are the pre-writing skills?

Hand skills refer to the strength and the dexterity (how well we can handle small objects) in our hands. Both depend on how we use the small muscles of our hands. However, we also need the muscles in our forearm to provide strength and stability. In fact, we often must coordinate and use both types of muscles to do things such as holding and using a pencil, using scissors, managing buttons, handling coins and using various utensils for eating. The thumb, index and middle fingers carry out the skilled movements while the ring and baby fingers provide stability and increase strength. It is also important to develop strength and control in the upper body and shoulders so we can steady ourselves. This gives us the freedom to use our hands to manipulate and control objects in a very precise manner.

Good sensory information is important for hand skills, as it tells our brain what we feel, how we move and where



our hands are as we do a task. The brain must coordinate these sensations with what we see so we can make small changes for precise coordination and muscle control. Imagine you are wearing a pair of heavy gloves and blurred glasses while you try to do your work. You would have difficulty coordinating your movements for most tasks! Children need to receive and coordinate accurate sensory information when developing pre-writing skills.

**Here are some suggestions to help your child develop good pre-writing skills:**

### General tips

#### **Tabletop activities**

The table and chair should be the right size for your child. His feet should be flat on the floor and forearms should rest comfortably on the tabletop (at approximately elbow level). Use a phonebook or box so his feet do not dangle or swing.

#### **Teach new skills**

Show your child how it's done, repeat the movements over and over again, and provide some physical guidance so he can feel how to perform the necessary movements. Have your child imitate you instead of copying from a book or paper.

#### **Play and draw on vertical surfaces**

Place the toy or paper at or above eye level. This will bring the wrist and hand into a better position to practise and it  
*please turn over*

will strengthen the movements and control that will be needed for printing, etc.



## Develop body awareness and directionality

- Play Simon Says and use terms such as “up & down,” “back & forth” and “front & back.”
- Sing action songs such as Hokey Pokey, This Old Man, The Wheels on the Bus and Itsy Bitsy Spider.

## Ways to strengthen the shoulder, arm and wrist

- Use tabletop easels or bookstands so your child can do the activity while seated. Flannel boards, chalkboards, sticker games, and letter and number magnets on the refrigerator can be used to strengthen the upper body while standing.
- Try tummy-lying on the floor with arms propped on forearms to read books, colour or do puzzles.
- Play games such as tug-of-war, wheelbarrow walking or animal walks.
- Use the playground equipment, such as the climbers and monkey bars, at your local park.

## Provide opportunities for sensory input

- Hide pennies, beads or other small objects in Play-Doh, sand or rice tubs for your child to find.
- Draw shapes and lines on sandpaper or carpet squares.
- Put everyday objects such as a key, toothbrush, spoon, eraser, paper clips, etc. into a bag. Your child identifies the objects by feeling them.

## Develop hand skills

- Change how activities are done to encourage finger use. For example, when playing with Lego® have your child rest his forearms on the table so that he uses his fingers to put the pieces together.
- Lace large beads with strings that have small plastic tips on the ends or use easy lacing cards.
- Put pennies into a piggy bank, play with finger puppets and spinning tops.
- Use small tongs to pick up cotton balls, pom-poms, blocks, etc.

## Pre-writing activities (no pencils required)

- Make lines, shapes and letters by: finger painting, painting with pudding or shaving cream, painting with water on the sidewalk and even with your fingers in the sand.
- Play shape and letter matching or recognition games.
- Play with puzzles, magnetic letters and Play-Doh.

*Above all, have fun with your child and remember that for a child, play is his/her work!!*

These activities are general in nature and are not intended to replace the intervention that may be provided by an occupational therapist. If you find that your child is struggling with these skills, you may wish to contact an occupational therapist in your area for assistance.

## Develop eye-hand coordination

- Roll, throw and catch large-sized balls.
- Play balloon volleyball, scarf toss and catch.
- Draw and scribble.
- Colour simple shapes, use Paint with Water books (the colours magically appear).
- Pour, ladle and spoon soapy water into different sized containers at the kitchen sink.

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Ask an OT is made possible by Dianne and other members of the Canadian Occupational Therapy Association (CAOT) who volunteer their time to answer questions to assist people to understand how occupational therapy can help them with their day to day challenges. Ask An OT now at [www.otworks.ca](http://www.otworks.ca).



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