

FINE MOTOR SKILLS

What activities can I complete with my child to develop the small movements in their fingers and hands to help them to hold a pencil or fasten a button?

Fine motor skills refer to the coordinated and controlled movements the small muscles of the hand and fingers make when picking up a small object, threading a bead or placing a coin into the slot of a piggy bank box. An essential component of fine motor skills is to develop your child's pinch grasp. A pinch grasp is made up of the thumb and index/first finger.

The following strategies are commonly used in Occupational Therapy and are recommended to develop your child's fine motor skills;

In order to develop fine motor skills your child first needs to have good core/trunk control, shoulder strength and stability, in addition to hand and pinch strength.

CORE STRENGTH: Your child's core relates to the muscles of their abdomen and back that help maintain posture and stability. Exercises that will develop your child's core strength include;

- ◆ Crab Hold: Hands are placed under the shoulders. Feet are placed under the knees. Holding for up to 30 seconds.
- ◆ Hedgehog: Arms are placed across the chest, bend knees, lift head, bring chin to chest. Holding for up to 30 seconds.
- ◆ Superman: Lie on tummy with both arms and legs out straight. Holding for up to 30 seconds.
- ◆ Counting out loud is important to ensure your child is not holding their breath.



SHOULDER STRENGTH AND STABILITY:

- ◆ Encourage your child to draw, colour, and doodle on vertical surfaces such as a free standing whiteboard or chalkboard.
- ◆ Tape a sheet of paper on the wall. Doodle. Draw shapes. Copy patterns.
- ◆ Complete a wheelbarrow walk. This involves lifting your child's legs, holding them at the knees, calves or ankles and encouraging them to walk forward on their hands. *Please refer to the handout entitled Gross Motor Skills for further details.*

HAND STRENGTH:

- ◆ Squeeze play doh or theraputty. Theraputty is a resistive putty that will strengthen muscles of the hand. It can be purchased in pharmacies or can be found online.
- ◆ Use spray bottles to water flowers or to clean the table after dinner.
- ◆ Use large tongs to pick up pairs of socks, bean bags or small balls.
- ◆ Use squeeze toys that involve grasping with the hand.



PINCH GRASP AND STRENGTH:

- ◆ Ask your child to practise getting their 'pinching fingers' ready before completing a fine motor task. This includes the thumb and index/first finger. You can ask your child to practise putting their other fingers away by curling them into their palm.
- ◆ Ensure your child is aware about which hand is their doing/dominant/writing hand and which hand is their helper/non dominant hand when completing fine motor activities. The doing hand needs to be strengthened to help with holding their pencil. Please refer to the tips and strategies handout entitled Hand Dominance for further details.
- ◆ Pinch, roll, squeeze or hide tiny pegs or beads in play doh or theraputty. Your child can find these beads using their pinching fingers.
- ◆ Make a prickly hedgehog using playdoh, insert cocktail sticks and place beads onto each cocktail stick using the pinch grasp.
- ◆ Tear sheets of paper using pinch grasp, scrunch in one hand and flick at a target using thumb and index finger.
- ◆ Picking up objects using large tweezers or chopsticks. This can be adapted by picking up Cheerio's, small cubes, small marshmallows or coins and placing into an ice cube tray.
- ◆ You can purchase 'jumbo tweezers' online that offer resistance to your child's pinch when picking up cotton balls or large marbles.
- ◆ Use the 'pinching fingers' to pick up clothes pegs and place onto the side of a container/box or the side of a book. Placing a peg onto the side of a thick book requires more pinch strength than a thin book.
- ◆ Threading activities – thread beads onto string, use lacing cards. Encourage your child to use their pinching fingers.
- ◆ Pick up coins using the pinching fingers and place through a slot in a container e.g. piggy bank.
- ◆ To help your child learn to manipulate objects in their dominant hand, they can practise picking up three to four coins using the dominant hand and storing the coins in their palm. Following this they can practise moving one coin at a time from the palm of their hand, using their thumb, towards the index/first finger. Pinch the coin and post them into the slot of a piggy bank.
- ◆ Similarly your child can practise moving and rolling a dice in the palm of their hand. Call out a number from one to six. Your child can practise moving the dice with their thumb until the number called is facing upwards.
- ◆ Peel off stickers using the pinch grasp.
- ◆ Construction toys, nuts and bolts using pinching fingers.
- ◆ Wind-up toys using the pinch grasp.
- ◆ Stamps-Try the flexible rubber stamps, sponge stamps and firm stamps.
- ◆ Using a child sized scissors, cut up play doh, theraputty, practise cutting card before paper. Ensure you have a left handed scissors if your child is left handed. Develop snipping action. Opening and closing the scissors. Remember thumbs need to be on top. Practise cutting on a straight line, curved line, zig zag line.



ADVANCED FINE MOTOR SKILLS:

- ◆ Wrapping a small present. Untying shoes that have been double knotted. Threading a needle. Sewing a button.

Cork & Kerry Primary Care Paediatric Occupational Therapy Departments



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