

ACTIVITIES TO DEVELOP PRE-WRITING AND FINE MOTOR 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 fine motor tasks.

- wheelbarrow walking, crab walking, and wall push-ups
- toys: orbiter, scooter boards, 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 figure eight 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, and then have the child draw the figure next to your model several times
- play 'Connect the Dots' (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 modelling activities as suggested above)
- paint at an easel (some of the modelling activities as suggested above can be done at the easel)
- Magna Doodle, 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 soft drink bottles and a small ball)
- play 'Hit the Balloon' with a medium-sized balloon.



MORE ACTIVITIES TO HELP YOUR CHILD DEVELOP FINE MOTOR SKILLS

- hide objects like coins or buttons inside a ball of putty, modelling clay or homemade play dough; have your child pull off pieces of the clay, using one finger and thumb until the objects are revealed; you can also give your child a ball of the clay and have him practice pinching (it may be one of the few times you encourage pinching!)
- string large beads on a shoelace or piece of yarn with the end wrapped in tape (if you don't have beads, rigatoni pasta is the perfect size for this activity). You can even dye the pasta different colours, simply put some of the pasta in a large, zip lock bag with a few drops of food colouring, shake the bag until it's distributed and place the pasta on a layer of paper towels to dry overnight
- transfer small items from one bowl to another using a clothespin (beads would work well for this activity, a variation is to use plastic tweezers to transfer grains of rice from one container to another).
- spray shaving cream on your kitchen counter or table and have your child smear it into a thin layer. They can use their index finger to practice writing letters, shapes, their name or to draw people. When they are done, give them a small, clean, damp sponge to wipe

away the shaving cream in a side-to-side motion, encouraging them to use their arm and wrist and to move their shoulders. A bonus of this activity is that the shaving cream will leave your table incredibly clean, even removing stubborn food stains!

- rip paper or newspaper into strips, placing both hands on top of the page and pulling in opposite directions. Have your child put one strip at a time into the palm of their hand and try to crumple it into a ball using just the fingers of that hand, to increase the strength in both hands, remember to have him switch hands
- use scissors to cut newspaper into strips or make paper snowflakes. The goal is to give your child a chance to develop the correct scissor grip, so it doesn't matter whether the creations are pretty or even recognizable
- invest in toys that use fine motor skills while your child is playing. For example, lacing cards, Lego, peg boards, Magnetic and erector sets all require good fine motor control
- tape a large piece of paper to an easel or the wall and have your child practice drawing a line from the top to the bottom of the paper
- play the add-a-line game. On a large piece of paper, draw a simple shape or line. Take turns connecting a different shape or line to create a new object. You can continue doing this until the paper is full or your masterpiece is complete. Be creative and use curvy lines and a variety of different shapes, encouraging your child to do the same.

ACTIVITIES WITH FINE MOTOR MANIPULATION

Pre-schoolers 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:

- moulding 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 fingertips
- stick pegs or toothpicks to make designs in play dough
- Tearing newspaper into strips and then crumpling them into balls. Use the balls to stuff a scarecrow or other art creations
- Scrunching up 1 sheet of newspaper in one hand (this is a super strength builder). Repeat with the other hand - alternating

- Using a plant sprayer to spray plants, (indoor or outdoor), or melt ‘monsters’ (Draw monster pictures with markers and the colours will run when sprayed)
- Picking up objects using large tweezers. This can be adapted by picking up Cheerios, small cubes, small marshmallows, coins etc. in counting games
- shaking dice by cupping the hands together, forming an empty air space between the palms
- using a small sized screwdriver
- lacing and sewing activities such as stringing beads, Cheerios, macaroni etc.
- using eye droppers to “pick up” coloured water for colour 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 talk 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. The correct scissor position is with the thumb and middle finger in the handles of the scissors, the first finger on the outside of the handle to stabilise, with fingers four and five curled into the palm.

- cutting junk mail, particularly the kind of paper used in magazine subscription cards
- making a fringe on the edge of a piece of construction paper
- cutting play dough with scissors
- cutting paper straws or shredded paper.



Sensory Activities:

The following activities should 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 with a similar 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 side of their 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 an easel, encourage the child to paint a continuous line across the entire paper – also from diagonal to diagonal.



*** Modified by Communication Support Service from a resource developed by Loubina Buxamusa, Occupational Therapist and Ann Mahoney, Early Childhood Specialist, 2011 DfE: SIES*

*****Parent please note: Many of the activities referred to in this list are available to borrow from SIES. Ask the teacher on client duty for help.**