

Developing hand skills

Why do some children find this difficult?

Effective hand skills are required for the development of important activities in a child's life. These include crayon, chalk and pencil skills, scissor skills, manipulating toys effectively and developing independence in tasks such as managing zips on a coat and managing cutlery. There are many reasons why children have difficulty developing these skills; including movement and coordination challenges, learning disabilities and developmental delay.

What you may observe

- Your child may not be able to use their hands easily to play.
- Your child may get frustrated trying to do something with their hands
- You may observe a poor or loose grip
- They may use their whole hand to hold something small, long after this developmental stage has been passed

They may have difficulty pointing or grasping using the index, thumb and middle finger.

Strategies and advice

A Palmar grasp is the first grasp to develop. These activities will help promote this :

- Squeezing water from sponges at bath time or in water play
- Posting toys such as shape sorters
- Squeezing Playdoh or other items
- Scrunching up paper balls
- Stacking blocks one on top of another

Cylinder grasp is the next grasp to develop. This involves the movement of the wrist. Encourage the following activities:

- Pushing and pulling toys such as prams etc.
- Playing 'Row, row, row your boat' holding a long cardboard roll
- Tug of war games
- Tipping water from a beaker during bath or water play
- Holding on to the swing
- Holding on to the handles of a trike or pedal car

Finger isolation refers to the ability to point with one finger at a time.

Encourage the following activities to promote this skill:

- Singing and doing the actions to 'Two Little Dickie Birds'
- Drawing in shaving foam or spray cream with fingers
- Flicking a ping pong ball or cotton wool ball with the fingers
- Playing with finger puppets
- Rhymes like 'Round and Round the Garden' or 'Incy Wincy Spider'
- Playing with a toy keyboard or press button toy
- Dialling the numbers on toy telephones
- Poking holes into Playdoh with fingers

The pincer grip is a refined movement we use it to pick up, hold and release small objects. This is essential to learn skills such as managing buttons, tying shoe laces, successfully handwriting and use scissors.

Use the following activities to help develop the pincer grip:

- Pop bubble wrap paper
- Place small pegs into a peg board
- Placing plastic coins in a money box
- Picking up chocolate buttons/raisins off the table
- Small handled inset puzzles
- Opening and closing clothes pegs
- Use tongs/tweezers to pick up small objects and place them in a container
- Threading beads
- Construction activities e.g. lego

The development of hand arches helps to shape the hand while holding objects. This allows the hand to make more refined movements through the fingers, apply the correct pressure and use the right amount of strength. The following activities will assist with the development of the muscles that form hand arches:

- Cutting Playdoh using a knife or pizza slice
- Using a turkey baster to blow ping pong or cotton wool balls across the table
- Using tweezers or salad tongs to pick up objects
- Games with clothes pegs
- Squeezing games with Playdoh and sponges

Finally using two hands together

- Catching a balloon
- Hitting a balloon with a rolling pin held with both hands
- Catching beanbags and large balls
- Toys that involve pushing and pulling with both hands
- Interlocking barrels/Russian dolls
- Rolling play dough with a rolling pin
- Duplo, Megablocks