

Play and Hand Skills

Using both hands

Strategies for babies who are not yet sitting:

- Make sure your baby is comfortable, has the right amount of support and is developmentally ready. A baby who is learning to lift their head up whilst lying on their tummy will not be ready to reach out for toys as well
- Make sure you have picked the right time and that your baby is alert
- Turn off distractions such as the TV and music
- Give them an object – something that is easy to see and without complicated patterns
- Help your baby by gently guiding their hands or their arms at the shoulders to the object so they know what movement or action you are encouraging. Let their hands go and then help them find their way there again, hopefully giving less and less help each time
- Try using toys with a variety of textures and watch to see if your baby has any preferences
- Always encourage your baby to use both arms, initially together. Then alternate using left and right sides. If you are doing this in side lying, then make sure your baby lies on both sides.

Strategies for babies who are sitting up:

- Make sure your baby has enough support and they are developmentally ready. If they are just learning to sit unsupported, they will not be ready to reach out as well. You may need to go back to floor play or make the activity easier until they are ready
- Present each toy or object in their reach and at the right height. If your baby is sitting on the floor between your legs, you could make or use a small table to place things on. Alternatively, the high chair with a tray may be suitable
- Make sure your baby can clearly see what to reach for. If the surface is cluttered, it may be difficult to see
- Guide your baby's hands to the object, supporting them at the elbow or shoulder. This gives them the sensation of the movement you want them to make. Give them time to practise. Take your hands off and allow them time to try and find the object again before offering your hands to help, hopefully giving less and less help each time
- Hold the objects or toys out to both their left and right sides and in the middle. Watch which hand they prefer to grasp with
- Offer toys of varying sizes. This will encourage them to use both hands, for example, a beach ball or large cuddly toy

Strategies for children:

These play activities have been put together to improve your child's hand skills. They can be done in any order and should ideally be practised 3 times a week for 15minutes:

- 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
- Play dough, plasticine, pastry. This can be cut, rolled into balls or sausages with the fingers, cut up with pastry cutters into different shapes, including letter shapes
- Papier-mâché modelling i.e. around balloon shapes, modelling clay- this is fun, messy and helps strengthen fingers
- Printing using potatoes or printing sticks or fingers using thickened paint (paint thickened with corn flour)
- Puppet play using finger puppets, or draw faces on the fingertips. Puppets can also be made very simply out of a sock and these are much easier to manipulate than a bought hand-puppet
- Paper folding games using coloured stiff card i.e. origami techniques, or paper aeroplanes
- Gardening - nurturing seeds and seedlings from tiny seeds to a small plant
- Cooking/baking, especially with rolling pins and the finger rubbing method to make crumble topping
- Paper chain making, cutting and sticking paper into collages or making a scrapbook for a particular event
- Using sticker books or stickers to make pictures of, or cards
- Games of copying peg board designs. Use a stop watch to make this harder
- Make necklaces out of threading painted macaroni onto wool or by using beads and string
- Make little woolly pom-poms by winding wool around cardboard rings
- Sewing cards
- Simple woodwork using balsa wood or similar

Apps for tablets include - Dexteria, magic sorter, bugs and buttons, spot the dot. Games that can be bought include:

- Fishing game – uses magnet on string to pick up metal 'fish'
- Marbles and marble run
- Tiddlywinks
- Jenga
- Pick up sticks
- Solitaire
- Draughts

- Connect 4
- Ludo
- Card games
- Buckaroo
- Dominoes
- Snakes and Ladders
- Monopoly – (Ideally being the banker!)
- Mastermind
- Matching pairs
- Fuzzy felt
- Frustration
- Don't buzz the wire
- Operation
- Puzzles
- Gaming