

the early years toolkit

hope making a difference choice understanding friendly
together quality understanding dedication hope enthusiastic specialist compassion
personal community people together help care understanding specialist dedication safe local support trust dependability
equality care choice independence respect community trust together quality care
tion hope enthusiastic specialist compassion safe health service local dependable help equality care d

Using both hands together

Why do some children find this difficult?

You have been directed to this Advice Sheet because your child mainly uses one side of their body to reach for objects and toys.

There are many reasons why some babies find this difficult, including if they have motor or movement difficulties, sensory difficulties or developmental delay. If you suspect any of these or you notice your baby cannot turn their head to the side, please contact CYPIT for further advice.

What you may see

This will vary but the baby is likely to prefer to lie on their back and will not reach out to hit their play gym or touch their parent's face. If they are held in sitting position, their arms may be held stiffly by their side and they may not use them to reach out. They may also appear to reach out or use one side of their body but not the other.

Strategies and Advice

For babies who are not sitting yet

- 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 while 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 and interested. Turn off the TV and music or even offer a dummy to suck on to help them concentrate.
- Give them an object or your face – something that is easy to see and without complicated patterns. Some toys will help gain your baby's attention better than others as each child is different.
- Help your baby by gently guiding their hands or their arms at the shoulders to the object or your face 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. Not all babies like cuddly toys.

- 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.

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.

If you see little improvement in these skills after two months of using this Advice Sheet; please contact CYPIT for further advice.