

the early years toolkit

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Developing hand skills

Why do some children find this difficult?

You have been directed to this Advice Sheet because your child is having difficulty developing their fine motor / hand skills. These are the skills needed to complete activities like feeding, dressing, playing or drawing. There are many reasons why children have difficulty developing these skills including movement problems, learning difficulties or developmental delay.

If you see no improvement after six months of using this Advice Sheet, please contact CYPIT for further advice.

What you may see

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

Strategies and Advice

Try the following activities to develop palmar grasp and release. This is the first grasp to develop. These activities will help promote gross grasp, hand strength and release:

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

Then to develop a cylinder grasp, which involves the movement of the wrist, try the following activities:

- Pushing and pulling toys such as prams etc.
- Playing 'Row, row, row your boat' holding a broom stick or 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

The pincer grip is a refined movement which involves holding the thumb in opposition to the fingers. We use it to pick up, hold and release small objects. We need it to do up buttons, tie our laces, write and use scissors. Use the following activities to help develop this grip:

- Threading beads or cotton reels or Playdoh – pinching and pulling it
- Pulling toys along on a string
- Lacing and sewing boards
- Picking up small objects with the thumb and fore finger, such as raisins, Cheerios etc.
- Peeling off stickers
- Making pictures using Fuzzy Felts
- Playing with pipe cleaners or Bendaroos
- Popping bubble wrap

Finger isolation refers to the ability to point with one finger at a time and helps in the development of the pincer grip and the pencil grip. Try the following activities to help develop 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 development of hand arches helps to shape the hand while holding objects. It allows the hand to make skilled movements through the fingers, apply the right pressure and use the right amount of strength. The following activities will help your child develop hand arches:

- Cutting Playdoh using a knife or pizza slice

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- 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
- Actions to 'Two Little Dickie Birds' keeping fingers in the palm of the hand