

the school years toolkit

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Developing in-hand manipulation

In-hand manipulation is the ability to move and position objects within one hand without the assistance of the other hand. This is the most complex fine motor skill. Children who have difficulty with in-hand manipulation may need to use both hands for activities that would typically require only one or they may need to unnecessarily stabilise an object against their body or an external support to get the job done.

This is an important process that develops coordination of the hand muscles to work efficiently for control of objects eg pencil.

Strategies and advice:

- Using little objects like paper clips, coins or buttons. Pick up several (one at a time) and hold in the palm of the hand. Then put them down one by one using the thumb and index finger. Try incorporating this when playing board games, marble race or bead threading. For example, before moving a game piece, hide the object in your hand and then bring it back to your fingertips.
- Practice removing small objects from a purse, bag or container one at a time and hiding each within the palm. Then placing them back, one at a time.
- String beads holding two or three beads within the palm.
- Cotton bud painting – Using two paint colours on each end of the cotton bud. Make prints by flipping from one end to the other. Alternatively, sharpen both ends of crayon or coloured pencils or use pencil with rubber on the end.
- Pick up a pencil and hold it ready for writing. Practise walking fingers to the other end and back.
- Use a hand held pencil sharpener to sharpen pencils.
- Turn the pencil between the thumb and fingertips: try turning it like a windmill in one direction, then the other.
- Flip a coin from head to tail within the fingers of one hand and then post in slotted container.
- Practice buttoning, zipping and snapping snaps.
- Turn dice within the fingertips to see different sides.
- Twist open or closed lids on small bottles or toothpaste tube held within the palm of the hand.