

Childrens Community Occupational Therapy

Developing Fine Motor Skills for Children

What is it? Fine Motor skill refers to the ability to use the small muscles in your hands for everyday tasks, activities, for play and learning.

Why is it important? It is easy to understand why it is important; without fine motor skills we may not be able to do up our shoes or buttons, take lids and tops off food and drink, use a pen for writing and play with favourite toys.

How you can help: You can help your child by offering opportunities to develop fine motor skills at a level that is suitable for your child; where they experience success learn new skills. You may need to offer plenty of repetition and practice, and give plenty of praise for small achievements.

Activities for early years:

- Encourage your baby to weight bear on their arms and hands e.g. pushing up while lying on tummy.
- Encourage your baby to reach up when they are lying on their back.
- Provide a supportive sitting position so your baby can concentrate on exploring with their hands.
- Provide toys that your baby can hold and pass between hands.
- Provide cause and affect toys (see picture).
- Encourage your child to point at pictures or poke their finger into playdough.
- Ensure that when your child is holding an object that their thumb is tucked around the toy and not into their palm.



Next stage activities to develop fine motor skills:

- Provide toys that come apart and fit together again
- Provide toys that can be posted or fitted into slots e.g. posting boxes, shape sorters
- Encourage a three fingered grasp (thumb and first two fingers) by playing with smaller toys e.g. peg boards or wooden blocks to stack.
- Introduce crayons and chalks; you may be able to buy triangular or special shaped markers e.g. Crayola Tadoodles (see picture).
- Use daily activities that encourage your child to hold something in the palm of their hand e.g. liquid soap into hand before washing
- Do action songs and rhymes together e.g. clapping games
- Do pouring activities in the bathtub or kitchen with water or dry food
- Do activities where your child pushes and pulls, works against gravity and has to exert some force e.g. climbing, pushing open doors, pushing a toy, helping to wash a car with a sponge



Continue to help develop fine motor skills by:

- Introduce using scissors, demonstrate how to hold them and help your child get started
- Encourage games and playing with toys where you use two hands together e.g. Duplo, Lego, threading beads
- Sing action rhymes where individual finger movement are required e.g. incy wincy spider
- Encourage your child to help with dressing/undressing themselves as much as possible
- Encourage your child to eat with a spoon, fork and possibly knife
- Provide toys with smaller parts (if this is safe) and where more precision and control is required e.g. coins into a piggy bank.

Ref: Fine Motor Skills for Children with Down syndrome by Maryanne Bruni

Dressing Instructions

As adults who already have dressing skills, it is easy to teach a skill too fast and not remember how the beginning dresser needs the task broken down into small easy-to-repeat steps. Sometimes we need to listen to our verbal instruction and notice that the wording may be unclear or that the student does not know all the terms we are using. A simple change in wording can make a difference.

Backwards chaining

The adult starts off the activity (i.e. completes stages one, two and three) and the child finishes it (i.e. completes stages four and five). Next time the adult does less and the child does more.

Forwards chaining

The child starts the activity and the adult finishes

ACTIVITIES TO HELP WITH DRESSING

General Guidelines:

1. Encourage the child to dress in the same place each day - use a stool or mat to sit on at home, and a specific chair or bench at school.
2. Help the child to organise their clothes prior to putting on - the right way around and front side uppermost. Start with loose clothing, preferably with a pattern/badge/bow on the front and/or tag at the back.

3. Help the child to pull the item on, and then get them to complete the movement (backward chaining). This encourages confidence building. The child can do more as confidence and competence increases.



Pre-dressing activities:

[Painting arms and legs](#), washing off and rubbing dry to increase awareness.

Play with and talk about [dressing a big doll](#).

Try [early dressing up play](#) - using a mask, hat or wig.

Try putting on [Mummy or Daddy's clothes](#)- socks or shirts and talking about them.

Play "[Simon Says](#)" - use a hoop or tube of cardboard. Encourage the child to pull hoop over arms and legs - e.g "Simon says put the hoop on your head".



1. Try [a star chart](#). The child gets a star each day if they get an item of clothing on by themselves, e.g T-shirt. The reward needs to be something the child is motivated by, a star usually works. It needs to be placed on the chart as soon as the child is dressed,

with lots of praise. You could have an extra special reward for 5 stars in a week. Other family members can join in too, for other achievements.

Example of chart

<i>Clothing</i>	<i>Monday</i>	<i>Tuesday</i>	<i>Wednesday</i>	<i>Thursday</i>	<i>Friday</i>
T-shirt	★				

Potty Training

Potty training your toddler can be a traumatic experience for both you and your child.

First is your child ready? You can get lots of advice from family, friends, [books](#), experts etc but you are the expert for your little one. You can try the [readiness checklist](#) from www.babycentre.co.uk, there is also a lot more information from [ABC of potty training](#) to 'your questions answered'. [Potty-secrets](#) guarantee to train your child in 1 weekend. Sing your child the '[underpants dance](#)' a song created especially to show children know how cool it is to wear underpants. Or buy books and dvd's from [Amazon](#).

Below are a few hints and tips.

Checking if your child is ready. Do they:- hold themselves when they need to go to the toilet ,want a clean nappy as soon as they have filled it, want privacy when they are filling their nappy.

The potty training starts here, take your child with you when choosing a potty, there are plenty of designs around from **car shaped** ones to ones that **make a tune** when they are used. Let your child get used to the potty by sitting them on it when they don't need to go to the toilet, encourage your child to tell you when they need to go to the toilet, give your child plenty of praise or even a little treat when they use the potty, do not tell your child off if they fail to use the potty or if they have an accident

If your child is not fully ready, (they may display the signs but you are battling every time) stop for a couple of months but tell your child what you are doing. Get a **rewards chart** that you can do together. Use training pants during the day (encouraging your child to go on the potty themselves) and nappies on a night. Let your child help you empty the potty into the toilet, this might help with the transition of potty training to toilet training.

Encourage hygiene by reminding children to wipe properly, with girls wiping from front to back and washing their hands after every visit

Toilet Training

Whether you are toilet training straight away or making the transition from potty training to using the toilet the principle remains the same. Some children might find the prospect of using a toilet very scary, they might think something is going to bite them on the bum (I remember thinking Jaws would get me - yes I'd just watched Jaws 1 and was frightened out of my skin) or they might think they will fall in.

- Buy a step or a child's toilet seat, ensure it is Here are a few more hints and tips to help you and your child to potty/ toilet heaven! age appropriate - again involve them in the buying process
- Help your child by putting on clothes that can be removed easily ie button, velcro etc, this might encourage them to go on their own more
- Let your childminder/ nursery know the process you are using, if not this could give your child mixed signals
- Let your child see you on the toilet, they will learn quicker by being shown what to do rather than being told
- If you are trying to stop nappies on a night take your child to the toilet before you go to bed, they will probably still be fast a sleep and you can have some very funny conversations with them

Above all else be patient!!!

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