



**DEVELOPING FINE
MOTOR SKILLS WITH
YOUNG CHILDREN**



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DEVELOPING FINE MOTOR SKILLS WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

We use our hands in many and varied ways. They are very clever tools and can perform complicated and intricate tasks. In order to do this our actions need to be developed from simple beginnings and practised until they are natural movements. However the most important factor in the development of fine motor skills is to have good control over the large movements our body makes and our ability to balance. For this reason children need plenty of opportunity to develop the strength and control of their whole body and their bigger movements in order to carry out these smaller, complex movements with their hands.

Motor co-ordination and control underpin almost everything else we do. Moving well means being able to...

- Co-ordinate the body as it moves.
- Co-ordinate different parts of the body so that movement is smooth.
- Judge the amount of speed and strength needed.
- Understand directionality.
- Manipulate objects
- Appreciate the rhythm of movements to aid repetition
- Make safety decisions about where and when to move
- Being able to stay still

So learning to do things with our hands is closely related to what we can do with the whole of our body. As young children develop the ability to control their big movements so we will see progress in their ability to manipulate things with their hands. Until you have the muscle strength and sense of balance and co-ordination that enables you to sit securely on a chair you will not be able to thread beads, draw or complete similar tasks with any success.

When planning a programme of activities to support the development of fine motor skills there are some key points to remember.

- This needs to be part of a programme that develops all movement skills and places most emphasis on large movements, co-ordination and balance.
- Activities need to be fun with lots of variety.
- Little and often is most effective.
- Always practise fine motor skills to fluency and rapid performance before moving onto the next step
- Find point where the child is competent and work on from there.

The following sections contain some ideas for resources and activities to help develop fine motor skills in young children. Be aware of the needs of each child in order to provide a good level of supervision and support. There are some activities involving small objects that might not be suitable for children who put things in their mouth. Some buttons or other mechanisms might be too stiff for children who have weak finger muscles. Many of the activities can be done with materials that are readily available in an early years setting or in the home.

FINE MOTOR DEVELOPMENT – BIRTH TO FIVE YEARS

Showing skills that develop at about the same time

MANIPULATION	WRITING	MODELLING	CUTTING	THREADING
Reaches for and grasps object				
Releases an object				
Passes toy from hand to hand				
Points with index finger				
Grasps string to pull a toy				
Uses pincer grip (picks things up with finger & thumb)	Marks paper with crayon			
Removes/ replaces objects in a container	Uses fingers for mark marking. Paint/sand/ flour			Puts rings onto rod or wooden spoon handle
Uses hands at midline. One holds, the other manipulates	Makes marks with large brushes, chinks etc.	Moulds and squeezes play dough	Squeezes sponges/ squeezezy toys	Pushes thick lace, on wooden bobbin, through hole in board
Stacks stackable objects				
Removed/ replaces pegs in a large pegboard	Scribbles freely		Opens and closes clothes pegs	Threads rings onto plastic tubing

MANIPULATION	WRITING	MODELLING	CUTTING	THREADING
Turns pages of a book one at a time	Applied paint to paper in random manner	Uses roller to flatten play dough	Fastens clothes pegs top stiff card	Threads cotton reels onto plastic washing line
Fills container with sand or water	Holds crayon with immature tripod grip	Uses dough cutters		
Builds tower of five or more bricks	Imitates drawing a vertical line		Practices opening and closing scissors	
Unscrews lids and turns on taps	Produces circular scribble	Rolls dough into sausages		Threads large buttons onto a lace
Hammers in pegs				
Fits Duplo together				
Puts together a three piece puzzle			Fastens small clothes pegs	Threads large beads onto shoelace
Hand preference obvious	Draws a closed circle	Cuts dough with knife	Snips fringe in thin card	
Pours water from one container to another	Applies paint, isolating the colours			
Screws nuts and bolts				
Can follow simple gluing sequence				
Uses knife for Spreading	Traces simple outline shapes	Rolls dough into balls	Cuts along a straight line	Threads small beads

MANIPULATION	WRITING	MODELLING	CUTTING	THREADING
Fits Lego together	Draws simple, recognisable pictures		Cuts along a curved line	Can lace around a plastic shape
	Uses pencil with mature grasp		Cuts around a simple shape	
Shows increasing control over clothes and fastenings	Colours in simple outline shapes	Makes a model from malleable materials		
	Traces over writing patterns			
	Draws between two tramlines			
	Draws a line to join two dots			Manages sewing cards
	Traces over letters of own name			
	Copies own name			
	Writes own name			

MANIPULATION

ACTION	RESOURCE	ACTIVITIES/STRATEGIES
Reaches for and grasps object	Baby gym Range of baby toys	Play with baby attracting him to the toys
Releases an object		Hand objects to the baby/put them in reach
Passes toy from hand to hand		
Points with index finger	People	Adults model pointing when sharing attention
Grasps string to pull a toy	Pull along toys	
Isolate and press firmly with right and left index fingers	Playdough Plasticine Finger paints Bubbles Finger puppets	Press fingers into dough to make holes Squash pellets of dough Press buttons Pop bubbles Encourage child to curl other fingers underneath in a pointing action
Uses pincer grip (picks things up with finger and thumb)	Finger food in small pieces	Picking up small food items such as raisins, cereals etc.
Removes/ replaces objects in a container	Variety of containers and small objects/food. Posting toys	
Uses hand at midline. One holds, the other manipulates	A range of toys needing two hands for operation.	Use instruments to make rhythms by moving alternating hands Play clapping games
Stacks stackable objects	Bricks, stacking cups, food cans, boxes, etc.	Building up towers to knock down. Seeing how high a tower can be before it falls down
Removes/ replaces pegs in a large peg board		Random placing, building towers, sorting colours, pattern
Turns pages of a book one at a time	Board books, bath books, books with thick pages/flaps, then paper pages	Picking up pieces of paper by the corner. Using playing cards
Fills container with sand or water	Wet sand	Building sandcastles and pies Pulling fingers through sand to make patterns
	Dry sand, oats, compost etc.	Pouring and filling Patting
	Water tray	Pouring, filling, siphoning, mixing, squeezing
Builds tower of five or more bricks	Variety of building blocks/boxes	Adult builds for child to knock down, child puts one block on, gradually increase number of blocks child builds.

MANIPULATION

ACTION	RESOURCES	ACTIVITIES/STRATEGIES
Posts small objects into containers	Money box and coins Sorting trays and small objects such as buttons, pastas and animals	Use 10p coins. Ask child to hold moneybox in one hand and pick up coins with the other using just thumb and first two fingers. Give a variety of objects to sort into a tray
Unscrew lids and turns on taps	Collection of screw top containers other twisting toys	Finding objects/sweets hidden in containers Hand washing
Hammers in pegs	Plastic pegs and boards with holes. Wood and nails Tap Tap Set	Show child how to look and aim the hammer rather than to bash in a random manner.
Fits Duplo together	A variety of simple construction kits	Building wall for Humpty Dumpty, bridges, houses for people, homes for animals etc.
Puts together a three piece puzzle	Variety of graded puzzles Two piece puzzle games (Things That Go Together)	Encourage child to look at the pieces carefully. Talk about the shape of the piece and the colours/pictures on it. Use physical actions and words to prompt
Can cross the midline	Chalk board White board Puzzles Bean bags Cars Flags Scarves	Draw across a chalkboard or white board, preferably one that is vertical. Pick up beads with the right hand on the left side and vice versa or place puzzle pieces so that the child has to reach across the board. Throw bean bags diagonally onto/into a large target. Place a marker to show child where to position his/her feet. Scribble over a large horizontal line. Transfer objects from left to right and right to left. Push a toy car around a racetrack or play mat. Waving a flag or scarf from side to side with/without music. Play action copying games that involve

		touching left side of body with right hand etc.
Pours water from one container to another	Water tray Bath Plastic containers Tea set	Snack time drinks. Pretend play tea parties
Screws nuts and bolts	Plastic nuts and bolts Medium sized metal nuts and bolts Padlocks and keys. Toys that have locking doors/lids.	Metal objects can be marked with colour for matching (do not use with children who still mouth objects).
Can follow simple gluing sequences	Glue sticks Glue spreaders	Collage, picture sequencing etc. Talk the child through the sequence of actions to help him remember it.
Uses knife for spreading	Children's table knives	Crackers and cheese spread, bread and butter etc.
Fits Lego together	Construction	More complex construction kits.
Shows increasing control over clothes and fastenings	Dressing up clothes and dolls clothes	Items offering a range of fastenings.

MODELLING

ACTION	RESOURCES	ACTIVITIES/STRATEGIES
Moulds and squeezes play dough	Playdough	Encourage the child to explore the dough poking, patting, and squeezing. Break off small pieces and squash with forefinger.
Uses roller to flatten Playdough	Playdough Variety of rollers Paint Paper	Give child a small piece of dough that will roll flat easily. Demonstrate how to use the roller. If the child is not applying enough pressure verbally prompt to press down, put your hands over his and press gently as you roll. Practise rolling long shapes, thin shapes, see who can roll the biggest shape. Practise rolling slices of bread to make them flatter. Use textured rollers to make patterns. Use textured rollers and paints to print patterns.
Uses dough cutters	Playdough or biscuit dough Cutters no larger than the size of the child's hand	Show child how to place the sharper side down and to press evenly. Use animal or vehicle cutters to make a shape picture. Make biscuits or shaped sandwiches.
Rolls dough into sausages	Playdough Biscuit dough Sausage meat	Show the child how to hold his hand flat as he rolls the dough between hand and board. See how long he can make the sausage before it breaks. Make real sausages. Roll sausage shapes to manipulate into letters, numbers, geometric shapes and pictures. Allow lots of practise because it is difficult to learn to apply pressure evenly.
Cuts dough with knife	Playdough Children's knives and dough cutting tools	Make sausages and cakes to cut up. Teach child how to 'saw' with the knife rather than drag.
Rolls Playdough into balls	Playdough Biscuit dough Marzipan Icing	Puts a small amount of dough in the palm of the hand. Place the other hand flat on top and move the hands in a circular motion. Press balls of biscuit dough to flatten for baking. Make balls of marzipan with food colouring to make oranges and apples.

<p>Makes a model from malleable materials</p>	<p>Playdough</p>	<p>Two balls of dough can be made into a snowman or a cat. Several balls with make a caterpillar. Squash the end of a sausage shape to make a snake. Play with the child demonstrating what to do and taking about how you are doing it. Let him suggest ideas for models and make them together gradually increasing the amount the child does. Use all the skills the child has mastered when making the models.</p>
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PLAYDOUGH EXERCISES FOR MANUAL DEXTERITY

STAGE ONE

Take a lump of dough and 'warm up' by starting to squeeze it between both hands.

STAGE TWO

Start to roll the dough into a straight sausage. Try to make the sausage even in thickness.

STAGE THREE

Squeeze along the top of the sausage between the index finger and the thumb to make 'spines', using the right hand.

STAGE FOUR

Using the index finger of the right hand, squash each spine down.

STAGE FIVE AND SIX

Repeat with left hand.

STAGE SEVEN

Pull a piece of dough off the end of the sausage, and roll between the two hands to make into a 'pea'. Make ten peas.

STAGE EIGHT

Arrange the peas into two lines of five peas on the table.
 Use both index fingers at the same time to squash the peas.
 Now squeeze each pea between the index finger and the thumb.
 Now use your thumbs to squash each pea.

STAGE NINE

Collect all peas together and squeeze into a big lump.

STAGE TEN

Hold the dough in the left hand, pull small pieces of dough off with the right index finger and thumb and replace into the pot.

THREADING

	RESOURCE	ACTIVITIES/STRATEGIES
Puts rings onto wooden rod or spoon handle	Wooden spoons Wooden rods on a stand Plastic or wooden rings Various ring stacking toys Cut rings from cardboard tubes.	Use large rings that will fit on easily. Adult holds bowl of spoon for child to fit ring on, then child holds spoon and ring. Play with stacking toys; start with adult steadying the toy.
Pushes thick lace, on wooden bobbin, through hole in board	Wooden boards with holes. These are usually shaped like trees, butterflies etc. open mesh, ribbons colours threads attaches to a small length of doweling.	Hold board between adult and child. Adult pokes the bobbin through for the child to catch and pull through. Encourage child to push the bobbin through another hole, adult pulls through. Then adult holds the board so the child can thread bobbin each way. Gradually work to the point where the child can manage alone. Ribbon and thick threads or lengths of fabric can be pushed through mesh fencing in a similar way.
Puts large beads onto wooden rods	Frame of upright rods on a stand with large beads or rings	Show the child how to look for the hole and place it onto the rod. Hold the stand steady so the child can concentrate on the beads.
Threads rings onto plastic tubing	Plastic tubing available from a DIY store Plastic Cardboard and wooden rings	A piece of tubing about 50cm – 80cm can be used in a similar way to the spoon. Start to use smaller rings so the child has to look more carefully to fit them on.
Threads cotton reels onto plastic washing line	Plastic washing line knotted at one end. Cotton reels and other threading equipment that has large enough holes.	Show the child how he needs to push the reel onto the washing line and move the hand holding the line to hold it at the top as the reel drops. Show the child how to 'catch it quickly' between thumb and finger. If pincer grip is not established practice picking up small items such as raising, cereals etc.

Threads large buttons onto thick lace	Flat threading shapes and buttons. Thick lace with stiffened end	Using the same approach as above the child can gradually refine the skill of threading by using increasingly smaller equipment. Once the child is reasonably competent at any stage threading can be used as part of sorting, matching, pattern making and counting activities. Remember to talk through the action as you do it so the child will understand your verbal prompts later. <i>When using small beads be aware of children who may put them in their mouth.</i>
Threads large beads onto shoe lace	Slightly thinner laces and a selection of differently shaped large beads	
Can lace around a shape	Manufactured plastic shapes or home made card ones that have holes punched around the edge. Laces or thick wool or ribbon that has one end stiffened by wrapping in Sellotape	Secure the lace to the shape. Show the child how to push the lace through the hole and bring it back over the top and into the next hole. Start with simple shapes such as circles and ovals. The child will need to turn the shape in much the same way as when cutting around it.
Manages sewing cards	Manufactured sewing cards that have pictures on them	The child will use thread on a blunt needle to go in and out of the holes to follow the outline of the picture. Show them how and use verbal prompts to remind them of the actions. Remember to talk about the safety issues when using needles.

MARK MAKING –GETTING STARTED

SKILL	RESOURCES	ACTIVITIES/STRATEGIES
Mark paper with crayon	Chunky, safe crayons for young children Paper	Adult marks surface drawing child's attention to the marks made (use excited voice). Encourage child to make marks holding over child's hand if necessary to help him/her understand the movement needed. Opportunities to see others mark making and to experiment with the materials.
Uses fingers for mark making	Paint Sand Flour	Finger painting on smooth surfaces. Drawing fingers through wet sand, flour, rice, cornstarch and shaving cream. Adult modelling.
Makes marks with large brushes, chalk etc.	Large paint brushes Outdoor chinks Squeezy bottles Sponges Objects for printing	Painting with water or drawing with chinks on paving. Painting on windows or other large, washable surfaces (vertical or horizontal). Printing with paint and a variety of objects. Squirting paint at a surface. Opportunity to explore mark making with a wide variety of media.
Scribbles freely	Various mark making equipment	Encourage free, easy movements patterns. Listen to rhythms of music and reproduce them on paper. Opportunity for child to practice skills on his/her own.
Applies paint to paper in random manner	Paint Brushes Easel or large sheets of paper Table	Adult modelling then opportunity to practice with some adult support.

<p>Holds and controls crayons</p>	<p>Triangular crayons Pencils Chunky, hand hugger crayons Water droppers Spring pegs Tweezers Small sorting objects</p>	<p>Squeezing soft foam ball in one hand, release and repeat in other hand. Screw up tissue paper in hand and release into container. Picking up small items and putting into containers. Small peg boards. Water play with eye droppers. Putting spring pegs around shoe boxes, paper plates etc. picking up objects with tweezers. Modelling action with writing tools, verbal prompting (e.g. little duck holds the crayon in his beak).</p>
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MARK MAKING - DEVELOPING CONTROL

SKILL	RESOURCES	ACTIVITIES/STRATEGIES
Imitates drawing a vertical line	Variety of writing media Wet sand and flour trays	Begin on a vertical surface so that 'up' and 'down' have meaning and the child can practice larger movements before smaller. Use sound effects or words e.g. 'down, down, down and bump and the bottom'. You may need to hold the child's hand. Draw balloons or kites so the child can draw the strings coming down. Draw cage bars over picture of an animal. Stripe patterns etc.
Produces circular scribble	As above	Activities similar to those outlined above. Use words, sounds, music to stimulate the action. Use lots of colours to make patterns.
Draw a closed circle	As above	Draw with the child. Encourage him/her to put the wheels on a car/train etc. demonstrate, talking about the action as you do so. Practise driving cars around a circular road. Run hands around tactile circular shapes.
Applies paint, isolating the colours	Paint Brushes Paper	Adult modelling. Choose colours to represent what you are drawing e.g. brown for a dog, talk about what you are painting and where you are positioning them. Paint lines and circles in different colours
Traces simple outline shapes	Clear Perspex sheets Windows Large paper with shapes drawn on	Start with large, simple shapes that the child can trace with a finger. Trace over textures surfaces with finger. Use finger-paints then brushes or crayons. On paper child uses a contrasting colour. Adult models and verbalises action required. Gradually refine size and shape of outline.
Draws simple recognisable pictures	A variety of mark making media	Demonstrating and drawing alongside the child. Adult comments on own drawing and movements made. Child can be asked to add parts of a picture such as eyes on a face. Encourage child to look at and explore objects.
Uses pencil with mature grasp	Triangular pencils and pencil grips	If grasp is not established refer to additional pincer grip and grasping advice sheet.

Colours in simple outline shapes	Paint Crayons Paper	Start with white shape on black background. Then shape with thick, black lines. Raise the edges by drawing over outline with PVA glue. Gradually reduce thickness of lines and then increase complexity of shape.
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WRITING SKILLS - INCREASING CONTROL AND LETTER FORMATION

SKILL	RESOURCES	ACTIVITIES/STRATEGIES
Traces over writing patterns	Paint Crayons Paper Perspex sheets Textured surfaces	Starting simply and in larger form. Talk about the movement, use songs or music. Make sure the child has the necessary spatial concept to understand verbal directions (up, down, under, over etc.) and teach these through large physical movements in the first instance.
Draws a line to join two dots		Pictures such as bee flying to flower, boy going to house. Draw from left to right and top to bottom.
Uses writing tool with appropriate pressure	Sandpaper Rubbers Wax Crayons Textured surfaces Chalks	Rubbing activities on textured surfaces leaves etc. children will increase pressure when given a shorter crayon. Rubbing out pencil marks. Place sandpaper under colouring sheet. Use chalks on a board.
Traces over letters of own name	Choose writing materials that 'flow' easily: Marker pens on white board Felt tips Roller pens etc.	Practice shapes in large form, talk about the movements and encourage the child to do so as they make the shape. Use songs and music to reinforce this. Allow children to copy from an image on their table rather than on a board. Ensure a stable seating position and position the paper at an angle to the child. Remind him/her to stabilise the paper with the non-preferred hand.
Copies own name		
Writes own name		
Forms most letters correctly		

CUTTING

ACTION	RESOURCES	ACTIVITIES/STRATEGIES
Squeezes sponges and squeaky toys	A variety of squeeze objects and sponges Playdough	Squeeze sponges to sink boats. Use sponges to transfer water from one container to another. Squeeze dough until it comes between the fingers. Pinch along the top of a sausage dough.
Opens and closes clothes pegs	Box Clothes pegs Food tongs and some objects	Put pegs around the edge of the box for the child to remove. The child needs to squeeze the peg to open it and not pull the peg. Use the food tongs to pick up objects and place them in containers. This could be done as a sorting activity. When the child can manage the tongs well ask him to hold the tray in his non-dominant hand and then use tongs to put the objects in.
Fastens clothes pegs to stiff card	Shoe box lid Paper plate Clothes pegs	Child holds shoebox lid in his non-dominant hand and uses the other to pick up and place the pegs. Child should turn the box lid rather than the hand with the peg in order to place them. Now ask child to do the same with a paper plate. Make colour and number patterns with the pegs.
Practices opening and closing scissors	A variety of scissors including spring scissors and those for left and right handed operation Playdough Scraps of card	Songs and rhymes about ducks are useful; the scissors can be the suck and open and lose when the duck quacks. Use works of dough for the scissors (duck) to snip (eat). Put a sticker on the child's thumbnail. The thumb needs to face upwards so the child should be able to see the sticker.
Fastens small clothes pegs	Small pegs such as those used for greeting cards Bulldog clips	Activities as above for larger pegs.
Snips fringe in thin card	A variety of scissors Thin card or thick paper that will not flop about	Use a 'mouse mat' or thick place mat on the table in front of the child. Put the paper on the mat so it extends over the front of the mat. Child places hand on paper. Blade of scissors

	As above	should slide between paper and table. When child has made some successful cuts he can pick the paper up and hold it.
Cuts along straight line		Draw a thick line across a narrow strip of card (about 3-4 cuts). Gradually increase the length of the lines to cut along. Make a series of holes along the line so the child can feel she/he is cutting properly. Encourage the child to look at the blades of the scissors by putting a spot of paint or a sticker on the end. Practise good cutting skills, non-dominant elbow in, scissors facing away from you, thumb on top.
Cuts along a curved line		The child needs to turn the paper rather than the scissors. The elbow of the arm that is holding the paper needs to stay in to the side of the body.
Cuts around a simple shape		Practise cutting around a corner. Stop at the end of the line, turn the paper, and continue to cut. Start with simple shapes, square, rectangle, triangle and circle. Allow child to reach proficiency before moving on to more complex shapes – please see additional scissor skills sheet.

This information has been put together by a multi agency team with representatives from health and education

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