

Parenting Together

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What Are Fine Motor Skills and Why are they Important?

Fine motor skills are the ability to make movements using the small muscles in our hands and wrists. Children rely on these skills to do key tasks in school and in everyday life.

We use fine motor skills to make small movements. These movements come so naturally to most people that we usually don't think about them. Fine motor skills are complex, however. They involve the coordinated efforts of the brain and muscles, and they are built on the gross motor skills that allow us to make bigger movements.

Fine motor skills aren't specific learning skills like reading or math are. But they directly impact how well children are able to learn and show what they know. For example, children need fine motor skills to circle an answer in a bubble on a test or write an essay or response.

Children need to use fine motor skills to do many school-related tasks. These include:

- Holding a crayon or pencil
- Drawing pictures and writing neatly
- Stacking blocks and stringing beads
- Using scissors, rulers and other tools

Children also need fine motor skills to do daily tasks like getting dressed and brushing their teeth.

There are many things you can do to help foster and encourage your child's fine motor skill development. In this newsletter, we will talk about six specific activities we especially like.

Fine Motor Skills Activities for Children

Play-Dough

Play-dough can be a great tool to help improve a child's fine motor skills. Encourage your child to squeeze, stretch, pinch, and roll "snakes" or "worms" with the play-dough. You can even have your child try to cut the play-dough with scissors, or use various tools such as cookie cutters, and plastic utensils in their play.

Painting

Different types of painting can help strengthen your child's hand-eye coordination and also their manual dexterity. Finger painting gives children an opportunity to use their hands—and to get messy, which is always fun! Painting with a brush helps them learn to hold a brush and gain greater control using it as a tool. (Paint-by-number kits are great for brush painting.) You can even find scratch-and-sniff painting, which adds in a fun sensory component.

Playing with Sponges

A new, clean sponge, some water and two bowls are all you need for another activity to build fine motor skills. Fill one bowl with water and leave the other empty. Your child can soak the sponge in the water and then squeeze out the sponge into the other bowl. It is an extremely simple game that is great for strengthening hands and forearms. If you cut off a cube of the sponge and have a small chalkboard and some chalk, you can also do a "Wet-Dry" multisensory handwriting activity, using both the chalk and the small wet sponge to draw and write.

Rice Races

Divide a handful of uncooked rice into two plastic bowls and have a third bowl empty. Give your child small plastic tweezers and grab a pair for yourself. Then, have a race to see who can be the first to transfer their rice into the empty bowl using the tweezers. If your child is having a hard time with the tiny grains of rice, try starting with an O-shaped cereal such as cheerios or fruit-loops instead.

Gardening

Gardening may seem like activities more suited to building gross motor skills when you think about digging, but there are parts that require smaller muscle control, too. For example, transferring seedlings into a garden requires hand-eye coordination skills to safely carry the smaller plant to the new location. Your child will also need to be able to grasp a trowel to dig and to use a pincer grasp when picking up seeds to plant. There is also the fun in seeing you child watch their seeds grow into plants & flowers!

The Book Nook

Dear Zoo

by Rod Campbell

¿Quién es como yo?

by Nicola Davies

Tap the Magic Tree

by Christie Matheson

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References

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