

# Fine Motor Development: The Essential Bases

Fine Motor Development does not happen in isolation from other skills. As with all areas of child development, a lag or delay in one area can impact on other areas of development.

In order for fine motor skills to develop, there are **Four Essential Bases** that need to be in place.

Think of your child's Fine Motor Development as a 4-legged stool. Each leg of the stool represents one of the bases for FM skills. When one of those legs is missing, or misshapen, the stool will wobble and topple over. Each of the legs has to be in place in order for the stool to be stable.

If your child has poor fine-motor skills, the first thing to do is to ascertain which of the Bases is less "stable" or less developed than the others, and then to work on that base.

The best activities for developing your child's Fine Motor skills are the ones that work on the underlying Essential Bases for Fine Motor Development.

## Four Essential Bases for Fine Motor skills:



### 1) Postural Control Base

- This refers to the bigger muscles of the shoulders and trunk that stabilise the arm so the fingers are free to move. When this base is shaky, a child could hold his pencil really tightly to give himself a firmer base, or press

really hard on the paper as he does not have enough control over it, or tense up at the shoulders and then he gets tired easily.

- Trying to use a pencil or scissors without adequate stability of the large shoulder girdle and trunk muscles is like trying to paint while on a wobbly stepladder. It takes huge amounts of effort, is extremely tiring and the results are usually lousy. So, in order to control the small muscles in the hand, the bigger muscles of the trunk and shoulders need to "hold steady."

### 2) Tactile Perception Base

(also known as touch perception)



- If you are not getting good feedback from your fingers, it is hard to be accurate with them. You know how strange dishes feel when you are wearing rubber gloves to wash them. It is hard to tell which piece of cutlery you are washing if you can't see it. You would not know if you were washing your wedding silver or your everyday fork until you looked at it.
- When a child has a poor touch perception base, it feels like they are doing everything with rubber gloves on. There is probably not anything wrong with the nerves in their hand, but their brain is not processing the information from the hands properly, and so fine motor development is not optimal.

### 3) Bilateral Coordination Base



- This is the ability to use the two sides of the body together in a coordinated way. It may seem like a strange base when we are talking about fine motor skills, but if your hands don't work well together, simple tasks like tying your shoelaces, cutting with scissors, and tightening a bolt will be tricky for you.

### 4) Hand Function



- This is the fourth Essential Base for fine motor skills, because the muscles of the hand need to learn to work well together to control pencils and other small objects. Closely related to that are wrist and forearm position, as the wrist and forearm get the hand into place for writing.

## Hand exercises and activities to help develop your child's fine motor skills.

Your aim with these activities is to help develop the fine motor skills for your child to get them ready for all the handwriting they are going to be doing in school.

It is important for children to move through the different stages of pencil grasp development in order to develop good fine motor skills.

If you are concerned about your child's pencil grip, try to encourage the use of a variety of fine motor activities and you should find that your child will naturally hold the pencil with a more functional pencil grip as fine motor abilities improve.

Don't forget to include gross motor activities to strengthen trunk and shoulder muscles.

### Prewriting Hand Exercises

#### 1) Money Boxes



- Use a regular money box or a recycled container and encourage your child to hold 2 or 3 coins in the hand and push them through one at a time without dropping the others
- Upgrade to using more coins as your child gets better at this task.
- Putting coins in a top slot is easier than pushing them through a side slot.
- If your child uses a side slot, make sure the thumb is under the fingers to get the most out of the exercise (as shown above).

#### 2) Egg Carton and Beans



- This is the same concept as the moneybox idea above, but using dried beans and an egg carton.
- In this example, we are reinforcing number concept by writing a number inside each hole, and the child has to add the correct number of beans.
- Have your child hold a few beans in his hand, and place them into the container one by one by moving a single bean up to the fingertips each time. It is harder than it sounds, especially for kids with poor fine motor skills!

- These hand exercises will help your child learn to use those fingers in the first step to developing good pencil control.



Show your child how to **isolate the tripod fingers** with a small slip of paper under the ring and little fingers  
Then try some of the activities below.

### 3) Playdough



- Don't underestimate the potential of this age-old activity!
- Leave out the paraphernalia and get your child to squash, squeeze, roll and pound the playdough to get those hand muscles moving.

#### Tripod Finger Activities



#### The Tripod Fingers

- The thumb, index and middle fingers are the fingers used to control the pencil when writing. These are called the tripod fingers.

### 1) Scissor Cutting



- Scissor cutting is by far one of the best hand exercises as it is a great way to getting the tripod fingers to work together well.
- Make sure your child uses the tripod fingers in the holes, and give lots of practice cutting out on straight lines before moving on to shapes and pictures.

### 2) Tripod Colouring



This activity does use a crayon, but it is used in such an undemanding way!

Use the tripod fingers to hold a crayon down flat and rub colour all over a large area, like this circle which is about to be cut out.

Although square and triangular crayons are great, they can be expensive, but regular crayons do the trick just as well.

### 3) Tearing Paper



- Tearing paper can be fun! First, check which way the grain of the magazine paper runs - the strips may run better horizontally or vertically.
- Either you or your child can tear the strips from the page. Once strips have been torn, then tear the strips into small squares across the grain.
- Use the tripod fingers to grasp the paper and tear. For best results, place the thumbs together on the top, and then pull one hand towards the body.
- (The second pic has a preschooler tearing the paper and he is not using his tripod fingers yet, but the pic shows how the thumbs should be placed together for the best tearing)
- You can use the paper squares to make a collage, which makes it a great hand exercise for any theme!



### 4) Clothes Pin Activities



#### INCORRECT grasp of the clothes pin!!

- Draw a single dot on one side of a clothes pin, and two dots on the other side. This shows your child where to place the fingers.
- Your child should grip the pins with the pads at the tops of the fingers, and not at the side of the index finger as can be seen in the picture above!
- Use the clothes pins to pick up and transfer items, or have your child pick up and place a number of clothes pins, making sure the tripod fingers are used correctly. See the pics below!



This child built a cage for his dinosaurs by placing clothes pins on an egg carton, then picked up "food" and transferred it to the cage.

#### Useful Websites for more actives:

<http://www.ot-mom-learning-activities.com/fine-motor-activities.html>

<http://www.education.com/activity/fine-motor-skills/>

<http://www.loveplayandlearn.com/the-ultimate-list-of-fine-motor-skills-activities-for-children/>