Fine Motor Skills

Hand Grasp Development

Kids learn a lot about their world through seeing, hearing, and *doing*. They use their hands to explore and to use toys. This helps them learn new things and helps them become more independent. So, how can you help your child? The best way to help him is to provide safe and fun toys and objects to hold and manipulate.

Listed in the chart below is the development of hand grasping skills. Hand use is influenced by the child's experience in playing with toys and objects. Hand use is also influenced by development of gross motor abilities, such as strength and balance, as well as the ability to process sensory information. So, to understand what else your child might be working on, check out the "more about what's happening" column below. Appropriate activities and toys for each fine motor stage are provided to facilitate your child's hand grasping skills. Have fun!

Please talk with your therapist about your child's current development. Discuss what your child can do with her hands, identify the next skills to work toward, and what activities and toys will be best for her.

Hands are used for exploring and acting on objects.

Fine motor skill	More about what's happening	Toys and Activities
Primitive reflex activity	Early in development, infant reflexes are present. These are motor behaviors that occur automatically in response to his head position, a noise, or a touch to his body. If these reflexes do not go away as the child gets older, they can interfere with the child's ability to use his hands voluntarily.	Discuss with your therapist how to best position your child to reduce reflex activity. **Toys**: Rattles (she may use a grasp reflex to hold it). Hands are often fisted. **Activities**: She will enjoy looking at your face (from a distance of 6-8 inches); watching mobiles and dangling toys; following moving objects with her eyes.
Whole hand grasp Uses fingers against palm; minimal thumb involvement	As the child's neck and trunk gain strength and stability, she will be able to turn and see objects to reach out to them. The accuracy of her reach improves as she uses her vision to guide her hand to the object. Sensory information gained through hands and the mouth helps mature the motor system.	**Toys**: Rattles; blocks the right size for small hands; soft books; plastic rings; small, soft animal toys that can be washed
Immature release: uses one hand to remove an object from the holding hand.	She will be able to bring her hands together to the center of her body. She will be able to voluntarily hold an object placed in her hand. She may reach for objects, though still not precisely.	**Toys**: Plastic rings and toy key chains to hold with both hands and begin to transfer toy from one hand to the other.

(continued)

Fine motor skill	More about what's happening	Activities and Toys
Partial hand grasp: thumb used with index and middle fingers	As the child's nervous system matures, the motor reflexes become "integrated" into, or a part of, typical, voluntary movement patterns. • Her hands will be open most of the time. • Transfers objects from one hand to another. • She will "rake" objects using fingers on the table surface to pick them up. • Later, she will be able to turn over objects in her hand to look at them. As the child's neck, shoulders, and trunk become stronger, she may be able to reach one hand out while on her tummy. The child is now able to use one hand independently of the other. An important sensory gain your child may make is a sense of her body position in space -- she is learning about symmetry and asymmetry in her movements.	**Toys**: Rattles; blocks and balls the right size for small hands; large child-safe toy cars, planes, figures; touch-and-feel books. **Activities**: Waving bye-bye; clapping hands, beginning to bang objects together.
Refined grasp and release	The child's ability to use his hands improves. He may gain the ability to: • Reach for objects more accurately. • Hold an object in each hand and purposefully bang them together. • Grasp objects using thumb side of hand. • Grasp objects between thumb and side of the pointer finger (as with a toy key). • Release objects in a container. • Pick up objects using the pads of the middle finger, pointer finger, and thumb together. Increased trunk strength, weight shifting, and trunk rotation allow the child to begin to creep (on tummy), crawl on hands and knees, and get in and out of sitting. As he explores his immediate space more efficiently, he strengthens his trunk, arms and hands.	**Toys**: Blocks; balls; child-safe plastic toys like cars, planes and people; stuffed animals; cause-and-effect toys requiring pushing buttons, turning knob, etc; musical toys requiring action by the child; containers for in-and-out toy play. **Activities**: Pulling off hats, sun glasses, lightweight scarves; rolling a ball to adult and rolling it across the room.
Finger grasp: • Immature pincer • Mature pincer	Grasping, releasing, and other fine motor skills continue to be refined. Your child may able to: • Use fingertips of index finger and thumb to pick up very small objects with precision. Your child may be standing by now! Initially, while she is standing, she may not able to use her hands as well due to her concentration on staying upright. When she wants to play with toys that require refine hand use, place her in a chair at a small table so she is well supported and can concentrate on using her hands.	**Toys**: Balls; blocks; cause-and-effect toys and musical toys that require the child to act on them; containers; stacking and nesting toys; basic pretend play toys (plastic figures), basic imitation games. **Activities**: Putting small objects in small container; pulling cover off a hidden object; finger feeding small items like Cheerios and raisins (if child chews well); finger action songs such as Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star.

Where to find toys

Your child doesn't need fancy, expensive toys. You can often make your own toys out of safe, household items like juice can lids (not sharp), cardboard canisters, cardboard boxes, scarves and scrap fabric. You can also find many good, used toys at secondhand stores, such as thrift shops and Goodwill. Just make sure they are clean and safe. When you would like to buy new toys or toys with a specific purpose, check out the resources on this page.

Websites

Beyond Play, http://www.beyondplay.com
Beyond Play offers a variety of toys for children in early intervention. The catalog features toys organized by specific features or domains, including cause and effect, communication, dramatic play, fine motor, oral motor, puzzles, sensory exploration, and social toys.

Melissa and Doug, http://www.melissaanddoug.com
Melissa and Doug offer great toys that are safe for children, sturdy, and educational.

Integrations, https://www.schoolspecialtyonline.net
Integrations is an online store offering therapeutic products for schools, but your child may enjoy many of these at home. In particular, check out the adapted play and sensorimotor sections.

Stores

Lakeshore Learning Store, www.lakeshorelearning.com
11027 N.E. 4th St.
Bellevue, WA 98004
(425) 462-8076
Lakeshore Learning Store offers toys and craft materials that have an educational purpose.

Top Ten Toys, www.toptentoys.com
104 N 85th Street,
Seattle, WA 98103
(206) 782-0098
This store's mission is to provide toys that are wholesome, stretch the mind, and facilitate creativity.