

What are fine motor skills?

Fine motor skills are needed to handle small objects, or do detailed work with your hands and fingers. Examples are writing, drawing, using scissors, buttoning shirts, tying shoes and stringing beads.

What is a delay and what causes it?

Most often, children learn fine motor skills around a certain age. When they are not able to do these skills around that age, it is called a delay. Delays may be caused by weak hand muscles.

What can be done?

Exercises can help children strengthen their hands and improve control.

You can do many of these exercises at home with your child. A therapist will recommend the best ones for your child and teach you how to do them. Some are listed here.

Hand strength activities

These include thumb and finger grasping or pinching:

- String beads or fruit loops, etc. on a string or piece of yarn.
- Find buttons or coins in therapy putty and put them into slots in coffee can lid. The therapist will show you how to use therapy putty to do hand exercises.
- Play with a Lite-Brite® game.
- Put small beans or pellets into bottles or containers.
- Pinch clothespins to put them on and take them off of a string, paper or cloth.
- Peel and put stickers on paper.
- Play with a potato head doll.
- Draw on a chalkboard or a piece of paper on the wall. Use small pieces of chalk or small broken pencils.
- Connect the dots in a dot-to-dot drawing. You can make the drawings yourself using simple pictures, like a kite or ball.
- Use a tweezers or tongs to pick up small items like beans, buttons, Lego's®, etc.
- Use nuts and bolts. Have your child screw the nuts on and off the bolts.
- Play with Colorforms®. You can put them on a window or mirror.

Many of the items used in these exercises are small and may be choking hazards. Watch your child closely when they are doing their exercises. Put the small items out of reach when not doing the exercises.

In-hand manipulation skills

- Color in small circles about this size: ○
- Build with small Lego toys.
- Sort cards during card games.
- Play games to sort small beads, buttons or beans.
 - Put three to four of the items in the palm of your child's hand. Have your child grab each item from their palm with their fingertips.

Scissor skills

- Cut drinking straws or old playing cards into small pieces.
- Cut thick paper such as magazine inserts.

Always watch your child when they are using scissors. Use children's scissors with rounded tips. Position your child's hand with the thumb up.

Handwriting skills

- Connect dots to form shapes.
- Draw letters with fingers on different textures such as sandpaper or felt.
- Put salt, shaving cream or finger paint on a tray and draw letters and numbers.
- Squeezing a bottle of glue or thick paint, have your child trace letters on paper. Once the glue is dry, have your child close their eyes and use their finger to trace the letters. You can also glue yarn in the shape of letters to trace and feel.

ALERT: Call your child's doctor, nurse, or clinic if you have any questions or concerns or if your child has special health care needs that were not covered by this information.

This sheet was created to help you care for your child or family member. It does not take the place of medical care. Talk with your healthcare provider for diagnosis, treatment and follow-up.