

Fine Motor & Gross Motor Fun

Postural Control

-Development occurs head-to-tail and in-to-out
-Postural control is the building block for all arm and leg movements

***Trunk control:** supports head movements, bending, twisting, sitting, standing

***Core stability:** the ability of the muscles around the spine to contract together to stabilize and protect the spine

***Shoulder stability:** The ability to pull together the muscles on either side of the shoulder joint to hold it steady. This allows the arm to be held in different positions while the forearm and hand do an activity

This is important because...

-If your trunk is weak, it will be difficult to sit up and complete desk work or keep focus on task.

-A strong base of support in our trunk allows us to perform precision movements in a coordinated manner

Bilateral Coordination

The ability to use both sides of the body together in a coordinated way.

1. Symmetrical Movements: Each leg or hand is doing the same action at the same time, like rolling out dough with a rolling pin.
2. Reciprocal Movements: one hand or leg performs an action, then the other one does the same movement in a rhythmic way, like pedaling a bike.
3. "Hold and Do" actions require one hand to give support while the other hand is doing the skilled work, such as cutting with scissors.

Why is this important for young learners?

-Using both sides of the body helps wake up the brain for learning.

-It's the basis for locomotor and fine motor skills.

Balance is...

the ability to maintain a controlled body position during any task.

-**The vestibular system** has head position sensors in our inner ear that sends signals of where our head is in space

-**Body awareness** (proprioception) sends signals from muscles and joints to make us aware of body position and movement.

-**Crossing Mid-line:** The ability to cross an imaginary line running from the child's nose to pelvis that divides the body into the left and right sides

Without good balance skills, a child might...

*fall or trip frequently

*lack fluidity of movement during active play

*avoid swings or uneven surfaces

Fine Motor Skills

Use of the small muscle of the hands for activities like using pencils, scissors, legos, picking up coins or fastening buttons

*The position of the wrist impacts school tool use

*The pinky side of the hand stabilizes, the index finger side works for precision

*Intrinsic strength means the fingers can move in precise little movements

*Finger isolation: each finger moves individually. The 4th and 5th fingers can stay in the palm for stability

*Thumb opposition: allows for precise tip-to-tip grip

This is important because:

-Fine motor skills are measured not only by accuracy of outcome, but also by speed and efficiency.

-This is the foundation for self-care skills and school-ready skills, especially handwriting and cutting.

How Can We Incorporate Movement Fun in our Preschool Day?

Postural Control

- Animal moves
- Wheelbarrow walk
- Belly time (prone on elbows)
- Burpees
- Yoga poses
- Writing under table
- Monkey bars
- Bridges
- Superman pose
- Crack the egg (supine flexion)
- Mountain climbers
- Leg lifts
- Chair push-ups
- Wall push-ups
- Crawl out over therapy ball

Bilateral Coordination

- ♦ Push a heavy box or cart
- ♦ Suspended ball games (2-hands on bat)
- ♦ Suspended loop games
- ♦ Catch and throw games
- ♦ Roll ball to child
- ♦ Pass relay: side to side/overhead/between legs
- ♦ Opening containers
- ♦ Managing fasteners
- ♦ Pulling self up on rope
- ♦ Propelling self on scooter board (make sure child is using alternating arm movements)
- ♦ Stirring with a spoon
- ♦ Squirting water bottles

Balance

- ◇ Balance beam or Stepping stones
- ◇ Incline beams
- ◇ 1-foot standing
- ◇ 1 or 2-foot hops
- ◇ Stop and Go frogs
- ◇ Trampoline
- ◇ Hoppity hop
- ◇ Dancing scarves
- ◇ Bean bag games
- ◇ Lazy 8's on vertical board
- ◇ Back-to-back pass with a peer
- ◇ Windmills

Fine Motor Skills:

(Keep tools and items in fingertip control if possible)

- * Tongs games
- * Twist dowel to wind up rope
- * Push item through tight slots
- * Play-doh pushers
- * Move key from palm to fingertips with only the "magic" of the child's finger movements
- * Vertical surfaces for pegboards, writing
- * Cut spiral designs
- * Cut cereal boxes for strengthening
- * Bead trees
- * Connect toys
- * Finger poems and songs

*<http://www.missjaimeot.com/shoulder-stability>

*<https://www.ot-mom-learning-activities.com>

*<https://www.yourtherapysource.com>

*<https://childdevelopment.com.au/>

*Beery, Keith E. and Natasha A. 2004. Beery VMI Developmental Teaching Activities. NCS Pearson, Inc.: Minneapolis, MN.

*<https://www.dayswithgrey.com/>

*<https://wyqualitycounts.org/>

*<https://www.toolstogrowot.com/>

*<https://www.growinghandsonkids.com/>

Compiled by Angie Thro, OTR/L

Five Simple Things you can do at home to help your child develop good handwriting habits

1. Encourage your child to hold his or her fork with thumb on top. Give short cues like, "Flip your thumb up," and then insert the eating utensil into his or her fingers correctly. Simply say, "Like that." This rotates the wrist in a similar way to writing. If this is hard, be sure to have food on the plate that scoops up easily, like yogurt. It might take a lot of consistent reminders at first, but it will definitely be worth it.



2. Use small writing tools like short crayons, broken chalk or golf pencils. Little tools held with fingertips help define the arches of the hand.
 - Cut Q-tips in half and dip them in paint for fun writing.
 - Use small medicine droppers with just the child's thumb and index finger pinching the bulb to release drops of colored water onto paper coffee filters for creative splash art.

3. Have your child write on vertical surfaces, just above eye level. Remember the Karate Kid from the '80s painting the long fence? It's the same concept: Repetitive movement on vertical surfaces strengthens the wrist and shoulder and sets up the child for future success! You can use a chalkboard, easel, clipboard or Magna Doodle on a screw, or simply use tape or magnets to hold the paper up vertically on the wall or fridge.



4. Encourage your child to pull open zip-lock baggies, cheese sticks, fruit snack packages, etc. Why? The motion of "pulling apart" items with the index and middle fingers opposite from the pad of thumb helps build strength for hand stability. Plus, two-handed tasks help wake up body awareness.
 - Have your child open up rubber bands with both hands and line them up on the outside of a soup can.
 - It's easier to practice connecting a zipper when the jacket is sitting on the table than it is when the child is wearing it.
 - Removing screw-top lids is a great way to use both hands at the same time too.

5. Angle any paper on which your child is writing about 35 degrees from the edge of the desk. If he or she is right handed, the right corner of the paper goes up. This promotes wrist extension. The paper needs to be in line with the forearm as the child is writing. You might need to anchor the paper down with tape, or make "tracks" with colored tape for proper paper placement on the table until your child forms this important habit.



Proper pencil grasp is a learned skill, but a lot can be done with or without a pencil in hand to help children build a strong foundation for handwriting.

What's Most Important for Preschool Handwriting?

1. Using both hands to accomplish a goal:

- *Twist on/off lids of bottles
- *Open yogurt and string cheese packages
- *Use Rolling pins
- *Fasten buttons and zippers
- *Hold paper down with one hand while writing with the other
- *Always encourage both hands to come to the work surface for play-doh, etc



Learning Without Tears: LWTears.com

2. Isolating fingers

- *Do finger plays like "Little Bunny Foo-foo"
- *Cut pancakes/spread butter with index finger pointed down shaft of butterknife
- *Use index finger to push holes into play-doh
- *Pick up little Cheerios with fingertip of index opposed to thumb.
(Ring finger and pinky should be tight in palm.)
- *Move a key from palm to fingertips with only finger movements

3. Strong shoulders provide basis for hand control

- *Playground equipment, like monkey bars
- *Animal moves, like crab walk, bear walk, seal crawl
- *Read on belly time
- *Reach up overhead
- *Wipe tables
- *Carry in groceries



4. Understanding basic strokes

- *Use a rope to talk about vertical, horizontal or curves
- *Point to where the wall meets the ceiling to explain "diagonals"
- *Explain what is the corner of a box, or room or paper
- *Always start your letters at the top!
- *Talk about your "Right" shoe, "Right" hand, "Right" ear, turning "Right" on the sidewalk
- *(Later, what's left is "Left")
- *Use a smiley face in the top left corner of a page, to anchor Left-to-Right

5. Using tools

- *Hold spoons and forks in "thumbs up" position
- *Cut straws or strips of cardstock with child-safe scissors
- *Use tongs with hinges up toward ceiling and fingertips controlling the "squeeze" action

Compiled by Angie Thro, Occupational Therapist
earlyessentials@sbcglobal.net