



This NEPS Handout has been developed by educational psychologists and is based on current knowledge in this area. It is intended as a guide only. Not all the advice here may apply to any one student or situation. Teachers and parents may wish to identify the strategies that will work best for them.

Strategies to Develop Fine Motor Skills Recommendations for Early Primary School Children



Introduction

It is important for children to develop muscle control in their hands and shoulders before beginning to learn to write. This control can be developed using the following activities:

- Strengthen hand grasp by using a hole-punch, making paper balls and squeezing sponges.
- Spraying with trigger type spray bottles.
- Provide opportunities for practicing timed grasp and release with tools other than scissors. Try using tweezers or tongs to sort cotton balls, blocks, play dough or balls.
- For the development of the child's web-space (the circle that forms with the index finger and thumb), that is needed to hold a pencil correctly: 'pop' the plastic 'bubbles' on packing sheets, open and close zip-locked bags, snapping snaps, winding up wind up toys that have a knob, use an eye-dropper to make pictures by mixing food colouring with water and dripping it on to paper towels;
- Playing tug of war – working in pairs using hoops children try to pull each other across a line.
- Practise unscrewing and screwing the lids of different types of jars and containers. Put objects inside to make the game more interesting.
- Paper Tearing – different textures and thickness can be used for variety, and to increase hand strength. The torn paper can either be used to make papier-maché masks, lanterns or to be scrunched up to make a collage.
- Finger games and exercises.



- Finger painting.
- Use of plasticine or Therapeutic Putty and/or modelling clay to knead and roll.
- Use of bricks and construction toys.
- Opening and fastening buttons - use buttons on a teddy or toy to begin with.
- Lacing - use lacing cards to create patterns and develop pincer grip.
- Threading beads – use beads of different colours, shapes and sizes to create patterns for child to copy. (Can help to develop number and pattern concepts)
- Cutting - start without the need for precision. Try cutting pieces of straws, grass, strips of paper or rolls of play dough. When scissors action has developed move on to cutting out basic shapes.
- Moving small objects from one container to another- use a bag of beads or marrowfat peas and use index finger and thumb to pick objects out of the bag one at a time. A timer can be used for motivation. Graduate to smaller objects such as grains of rice.
- Putting coins (or counters) into a money box.
- Using finger paints or shaving foam to make shapes on a desk.

- Drawing between parallel lines- this can be introduced at an appropriate level for the child in question and gradually made more difficult e.g.
 - Moving a toy car (or a finger) between lines on the floor.
 - Moving chalk (or a finger) between lines on a blackboard.
 - Moving a finger between lines on a sheet of paper.
 - Moving a crayon between lines on a sheet of paper.
 - Moving a pencil between lines on a sheet of paper.

The distances between the lines can gradually be reduced. Check that the child is holding the pencil correctly and that the paper is kept still, and that s/he always goes from left to right. Start by using straight lines, then make it more difficult by introducing angles and later curves.

- Joining dots- place dots further apart to make this more difficult.
- Tracing activities- these can be done with the finger first, then with crayon, then pencil. Start with straight lines, then introduce angles and finally curves.
- Shape exercises- start by getting the child to continue the given pattern either by tracing or by joining the dots. Copying can then be introduced.
- Letter formation- use activities suggested above to give practice in each letter. Use large coloured dots to show the child where to begin the letter and indicate direction with arrows. Sandpaper letters can help. Teach letters in families.
- Practice penmanship on the blackboard. This promotes shoulder, elbow and wrist strength as well as the correct pencil grip.
- Wrapping the pencil in play-dough or 'silly putty'. This may help to relax the grip.
- Clothes Pegs – clipping pegs onto and removing from an empty shoe box or a piece of cardboard (using thumb and index finger).
 - You can do this against the clock or as a timed exercise
 - Make a sunflower or a lion around a paper plate
 - Use the pegs to work on maths concepts as well e.g. 3 pegs + 4 pegs = ?
Or write a sum down on card and s/he has to place the correct amount of pegs to give an answer.