Fine motor skills activities:

Fine motor skills are needed to complete activities such as writing, cutting with scissors, dressing, brushing teeth and hair, feeding and playing. They require muscle and joint stability, hand-eye co-ordination, tactile (touch) awareness, grips and grasps, finger isolation, hand arches, manipulation skills and motor planning.



Strategies and Advice

The following activities will support the development of better grip strength, finger isolation, precision grips and hand arches.

Palmar grasp and release

This is one of the first stages of a child's development and is a building block for all other fine motor skills. Activities to help promote gross grasp, strength and release are:

- Squeezing water from sponges at bath time
- Posting toys
- Squeezing play dough
- Scrunching up paper into balls
- Stacking blocks on top of one another
- Throwing objects

This grasp then develops into more functional grasps, such as a cylindrical grasp, which begins to involve the movement of the wrist. Activities that help to develop such a grasp are:

- Pushing / pulling toys
- Row, row, row your boat' – holding a broom stick
- Tug-of-war
- Tipping water from a beaker or pouring it from one container into another
- Holding onto the rope of a swing
- Holding onto the handles of a tricycle or pedal car

Pincer grip

A pincer grip is the use of an index finger and thumb to pick up, hold and release an object. This is a more precise and refined grip than a 'palmar grasp' or 'cylindrical grip'.
Your child will initially use their thumb and the side of their index finger.

It is important to develop this grip as it comes before pencil and scissor grips. It is important for functional activities such as doing up buttons, zips, laces, handwriting and scissor skills.
Activities to help develop and refine the pincer grip include:

- Using tweezers to pick up objects and dropping them into containers
- Threading beads
- Playdough – pinching, squeezing, patting, poking and pulling it
- Pulling toys using a string

- Lacing and sewing boards
- Picking up small objects such as rice, beads, marbles, raisins and lentils between the thumb and forefinger and placing them into containers
- Tearing paper into strips
- Peeling off small stickers to make into a picture
- Turning pages in a book
- Making paper chains
- 'Fuzzy Felt'
- Playing games with clothes pegs
- Making pipe cleaners into shapes, objects or animals
- Popping bubble wrap

Finger isolation
This refers to the ability to point with one finger at a time. This is important for your child to be able to do as it helps with the development of more refined grips such as pincer grip and pencil grip which will aid them with functional activities such as handwriting, using scissors, doing up buttons, zips and laces and using a knife and fork.
Activities to help promote finger isolation are:

- Drawing in shaving foam or whipped cream with a finger
- Flicking a ping-pong ball or cotton wool ball using fingers
- Playing with finger puppets
- Finger rhymes such as 'Round and round the garden like a teddy bear' or 'Incey Wincey Spider'
- Using a typewriter, keyboard or piano
- Pressing beads or poking holes into Playdough using each finger in turn
- Dialling the numbers of a toy telephone

Hand arches
The development of arches in the hand is essential for fine manipulation. They help to shape the hand while holding objects such as a pencil. They allow for controlled pressure and skilled movements of the fingers. They also help the hand to hold objects with sufficient strength.

If these arches are not developed appropriately, your child may experience difficulties with gripping and using tools such as a knife and fork, pencils and scissors. Activities to help develop hand arches are:

- Shaking dice using a cupped hand
- Cutting Playdough using a knife or pizza slice
- Writing with chalk on a chalkboard using all four fingertips and the thumb
- Using a dress maker's wheel to make dotted lines on paper or card
- Using a turkey baster to blow ping-pong balls or cotton wool balls across a table
- Using Playdough to make balls and press them into the palm of the hand
- Using tweezers or tongs to pick up small objects
- Playing games with pegs
- Any activity with buttons, coins or small objects
- Card games
- Squeezing games using sponges, bubble wrap and Playdough