

Activities to improve

# FINE MOTOR SKILLS



GIG  
CYMRU  
NHS  
WALES

Bwrdd Iechyd Prifysgol  
Aneurin Bevan  
University Health Board



# INTRODUCTION

Many children experience difficulties using their hands for skilled manual dexterity tasks. They appear clumsy and uncoordinated and often become frustrated due to their lack of skill.

Children who have poor fine motor skills often drop things and knock them over and they frequently avoid tasks they find too difficult.



# PRACTISE, PRACTISE, PRACTISE!

It's important to give children regular opportunities throughout the day (little and often) to practise a selection of activities to promote the development of their fine motor dexterity.

This will have a beneficial impact on their ability with functional tasks such as fastening buttons and using a knife and fork.



# PRACTISE, PRACTISE, PRACTISE!

Before starting, make sure your child is sitting in a stable position with their feet flat on the floor. Always try to start with an activity the child can easily achieve.

This will help them feel more confident and may encourage motivation for later activities. Even things like opening containers can become part of the activity.



# PRACTISE, PRACTISE, PRACTISE!

Use a selection of different containers such as Tupperware boxes, zipped wallets, and screw top jars - encourage your child to open them to find what's inside! This presentation provides a selection of suggested activities – don't be afraid to be creative and add some more ideas. It's important to vary the activities to avoid your child becoming bored, but REMEMBER: children need plenty of repetitive practise to become proficient so repeating activities is ok!



# THE BUILDING BLOCKS FOR HAND SKILLS

CLICK ON THE TABS TO JUMP TO EACH SECTION



1

Core Stability and Balance

2

Shoulder Stability

3

Bilateral Integration and Hand Dominance

4

Dexterity and Coordination

5

Hand Strength



# CORE STABILITY AND BALANCE



If your child has poor core stability, they will have to work harder to maintain sitting balance.

There are a number of exercises you can do to help your child develop better core stability and balance.



[VIEW EXERCISES](#)



# CORE STABILITY AND BALANCE

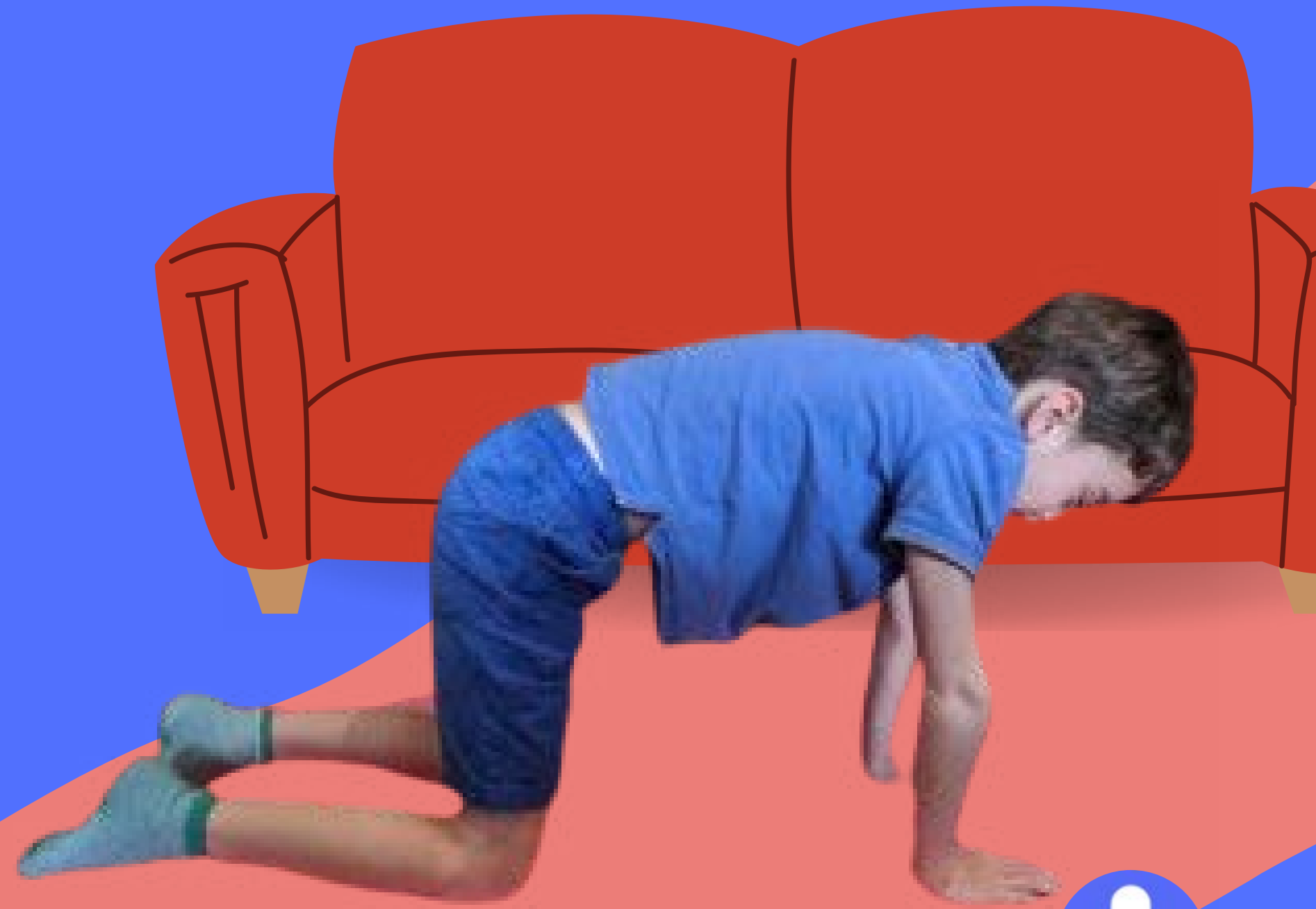


## On All 4s

Encourage your child to adopt a hands and knees position. Make sure they keep their back straight and a slight bend in their elbows.

If they can hold this position, see if they can resist falling over if you give them a gentle push from either side.

Exercise 1 / 6



# CORE STABILITY AND BALANCE

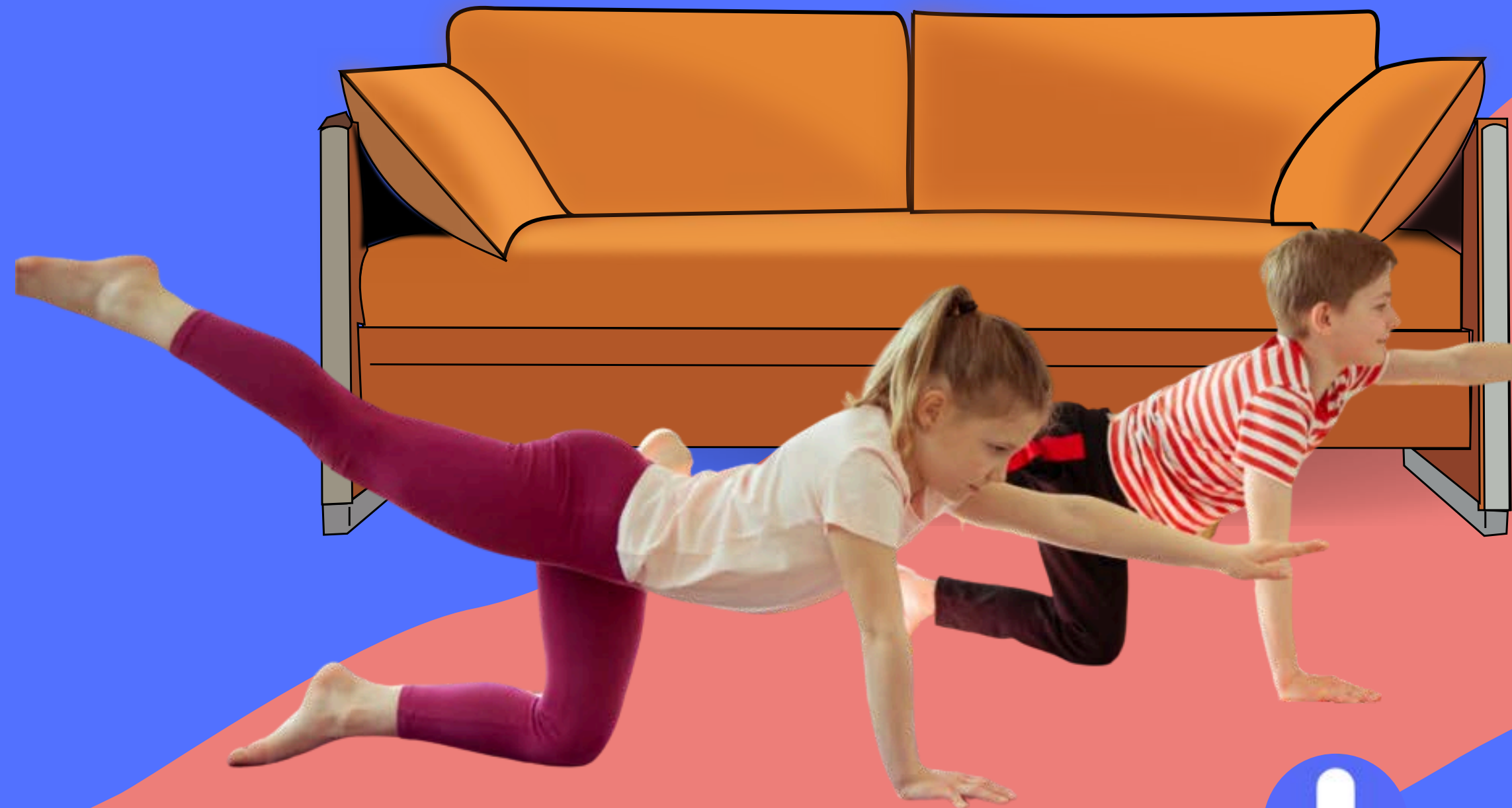


## Superman

Can they keep their balance if they lift one arm or one leg or opposite arm and leg at the same time!?

Make sure they keep their back flat and don't drop their tummy.

Exercise 2 / 6



# CORE STABILITY AND BALANCE



## Balancing Bridge

Encourage your child to lift their tummy to create a 'bridge'

See how many cars you can drive under the bridge before it needs to collapse. Make sure the lifting and lowering the bridge is slow and controlled to activate the core muscles.

Exercise 3 / 6



# CORE STABILITY AND BALANCE



## Partner Push

Have two children in high kneel position with arms out straight and palms touching.

Try to push and resist to avoid losing balance.



Exercise 4 / 6



# CORE STABILITY AND BALANCE



## Beanbag Balance

Encourage your child to adopt a 'crab position' and see if they can balance a beanbag on their tummy.

How far can they 'crab walk' before the beanbag falls off?



Exercise 5 / 6



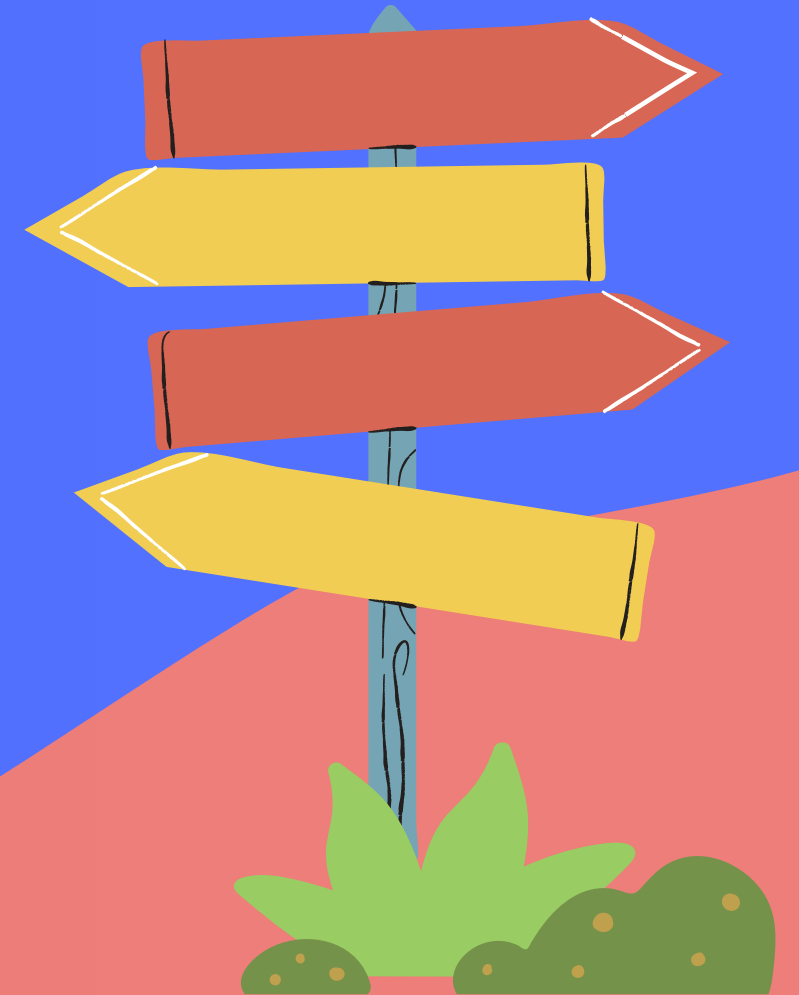
# CORE STABILITY AND BALANCE



## Tightrope Walk

Encourage your child to keep their balance when walking along a 'tightrope' – they can't step off the line or they'll fall off! As their balance improves, you can increase the difficulty by:

- walking on tip-toes
- walking heel-to-toe forwards
- walking heel-to-toe backwards.



Exercise 6 / 6



# SHOULDER STABILITY

It's important to develop the muscles around the shoulder joint as this helps keep the shoulder stable whilst the child moves their hand and arm for different activities. Children develop shoulder stability through activities that require them to apply pressure into the shoulder joint (weight-bearing) or require stabilisation of the shoulders.

[VIEW EXERCISES](#)



# SHOULDER STABILITY



## Play with Playdoh

Encourage your child to apply pressure through their hands or rolling pin to knead and flatten the dough.

Use two hands to push down on shape cutters.

Exercise 1 / 5



# SHOULDER STABILITY



## High Level Drawing

Draw on a big piece of paper taped to the wall. Big movements will develop strength around the shoulder joint. High kneeling will also work on core stability. You could also practise this activity in hands and knees position to encourage weight bearing through shoulders.

Exercise 2 / 5



# SHOULDER STABILITY

## Make A Cake

Make a cake, rice crispie cakes or biscuits. Encourage your child to hold the bowl steady and stir the mixture.

Use shape cutters to cut out biscuits. Use two hands to push down on shape cutters.

Exercise 3 / 5



# SHOULDER STABILITY



## Push, Push, Push

Encourage your child to push a basket of laundry or a toy box.

Or see if they can push a toy pram or their own mini trolley around the supermarket.

Exercise 4 / 5



# SHOULDER STABILITY

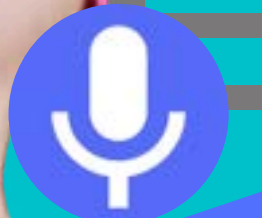


## Tug of War

This is a great way to work on their shoulder stability as well as their core stability and balance.



Exercise 5 / 5



# BILATERAL INTEGRATION



Bilateral integration involves being able to coordinate both sides of the body to work effectively together. Lots of fine motor activities require use of two hands together, often requiring each hand to perform separate tasks. Children usually develop a dominant hand and a supporting hand.



[VIEW EXERCISES](#)



# BILATERAL INTEGRATION

## Threading Beads

Threading activities require two hands to work together whilst doing separate jobs (i.e. one to hold the lace, another to hold the bead). You can make it easier by using different materials, for example threading a drinking straw with pasta tubes or a pipe cleaner with Cheerios.

Exercise 1 / 3



# BILATERAL INTEGRATION



## Wringing Out Water

Wringing out water is a great way to develop bilateral integration.

You could have a race to see who can transfer water from one container to another the fastest.

Exercise 2 / 3



# BILATERAL INTEGRATION

## Construction Games

Try playing construction games like Lego or Mr Potato Head which require using two hands – one to stabilise the body, another to insert the body part.

Exercise 3 / 3



# DEXTERITY AND CO-ORDINATION



Fine motor skills often involve precise movements at speed.

Children therefore need to be able to use a different movement with each finger and thumb simultaneously to manipulate tools and objects.



[VIEW EXERCISES](#)



# DEXTERITY AND CO-ORDINATION



## Pompom Sort

Try sorting pompoms or beads with tweezers – ask your child to organise the items by colour or size (if this is too difficult they could use their thumb and index finger instead to help develop a pincer grasp). Using tweezers is a helpful pre-requisite for developing scissor skills.

Exercise 1 / 5

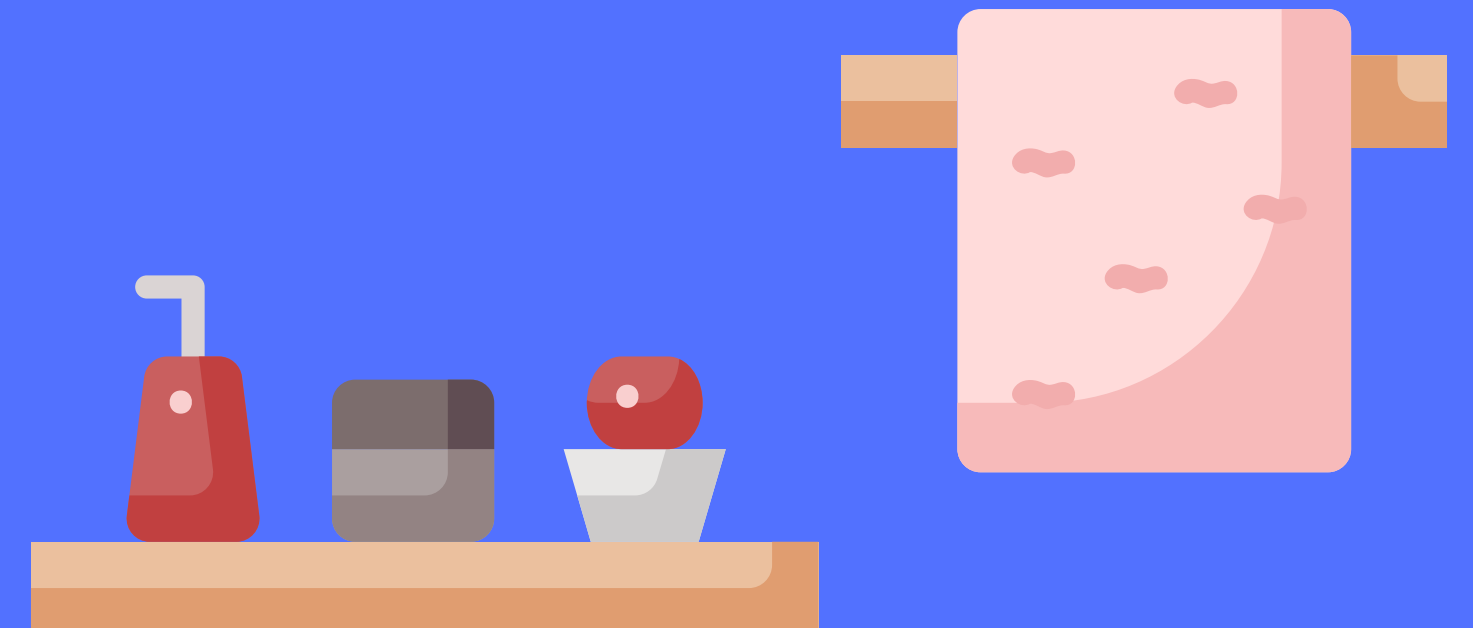


# DEXTERITY AND CO-ORDINATION



## Squeezing Bath Toys

Squeezing bath toys can also help develop dexterity and early scissor skills. Practise squirting water in the bath. Make cotton wool balls move by squeezing the toy to blow air, you could even have a race!



Exercise 2 / 5



# DEXTERITY AND CO-ORDINATION



## Posting Coins

Practise posting coins into slot positioned either horizontally or vertically, using a pincer grip (thumb and index finger).  
Practise with each hand - You could even time each hand to see which is fastest.  
Practise with coins of varying size and try posting horizontally and vertically.



Exercise 3 / 5



# DEXTERITY AND CO-ORDINATION



## Finger Puppets and Painting

Finger puppets or finger painting helps children to learn how to isolate the movements of each finger and thumb.

When painting experiment using fingers, knuckles, side of hands and palm of hands.

Exercise 4 / 5



# DEXTERITY AND CO-ORDINATION

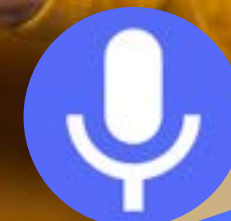


## In-hand manipulation

Practise moving a small object (coin or marble) from palm to fingertips, using fingers only (one hand at a time).

Practise holding coins in the palm whilst picking up another coin with thumb and index finger (pincer grip). How many coins can your child hold without dropping any!?

Exercise 5 / 5



# HAND STRENGTH

Children with poor hand strength tend to have difficulty with tasks that require force e.g. using a knife and fork. Playdoh and construction toys like Lego and sticklebricks are an excellent activity to develop hand strength. Here are some ideas of exercises and games to play.

[VIEW EXERCISES](#)



# HAND STRENGTH



## Crafty Creatures

Encourage your child to roll the playdoh into different shapes and use their thumb and index finger to push straws, matchsticks, pipe cleaners or googly eyes in to make bugs or other animals.

Exercise 1 / 6



# HAND STRENGTH

## Roll the Dough

Encourage your child to roll balls of playdoh then squash them between their thumb and fingers.

(use one finger at a time and swap which finger they use).

Exercise 2 / 6



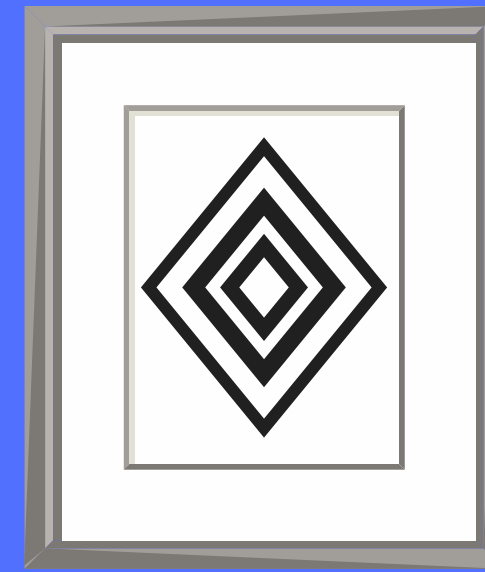
# HAND STRENGTH

## Buried Treasure

Hide beads or marbles in a ball of playdoh and ask your child to find the treasure.

Encourage them to use a pincer grip (thumb and index finger) to pick out the beads/marbles.

Exercise 3 / 6



# HAND STRENGTH

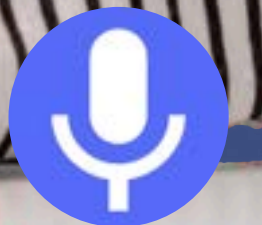


## Dinosaur Dough

Make a dinosaur, crocodile or flowers out of playdough.

Encourage your child to use their thumb and index finger to pinch the playdough to make the spikes/petals.

Exercise 4 / 6



# HAND STRENGTH



## Peg It

Clothes peg games are great for building hand strength – think of different ways to open and close the pegs (e.g. thumb and index finger, thumb and little finger etc). Different pegs will require varying strength to open. You can also include colour or number matching games.

Exercise 5 / 6



# HAND STRENGTH



## Connect The Pieces

Construction games like pop-beads, lego, sticklebricks or Mr Potato Head all help develop hand strength, hand-eye coordination and bilateral integration as they require children to use two hands and apply force to connect the parts.

Exercise 6 / 6



# FUNCTIONAL TASKS



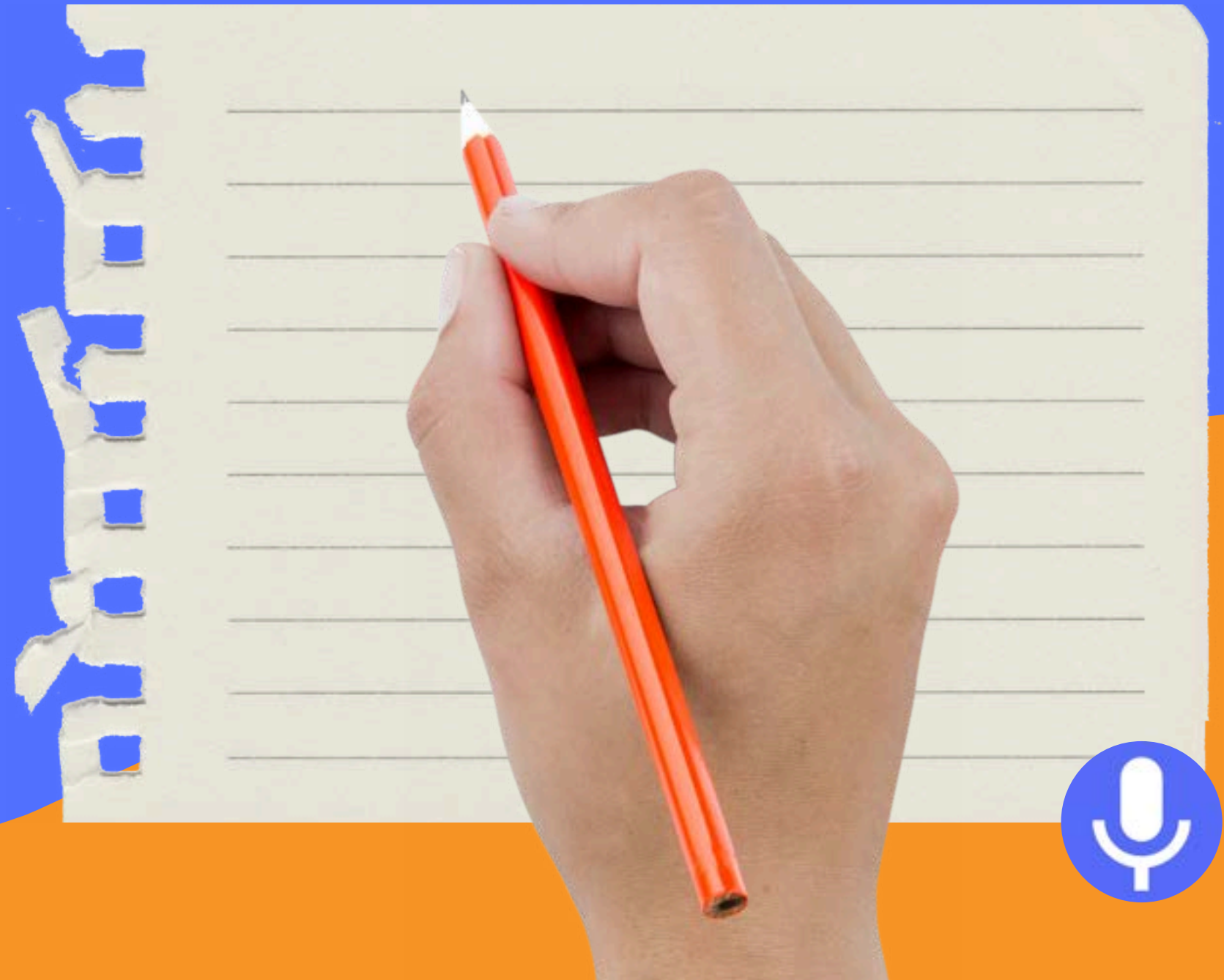
Which tasks does your child struggle with?

**PENCIL SKILLS**

**SCISSOR SKILLS**

**CUTLERY SKILLS**

**ZIPS AND BUTTONS**



# PENCIL SKILLS



Using a multi-sensory approach including gross motor movements gives sensory feedback to your child which can help them learn the movement patterns required to make each shape:

- Finger pointing to draw in sand or shaving foam
- Painting on big paper on the floor or wall
- Draw with crayons/ felt pens on textured wallpaper or corrugated cardboard
- Draw with chalk on the floor outside
- Make the shapes with playdoh, pipe cleaners or stickers



# PENCIL SKILLS

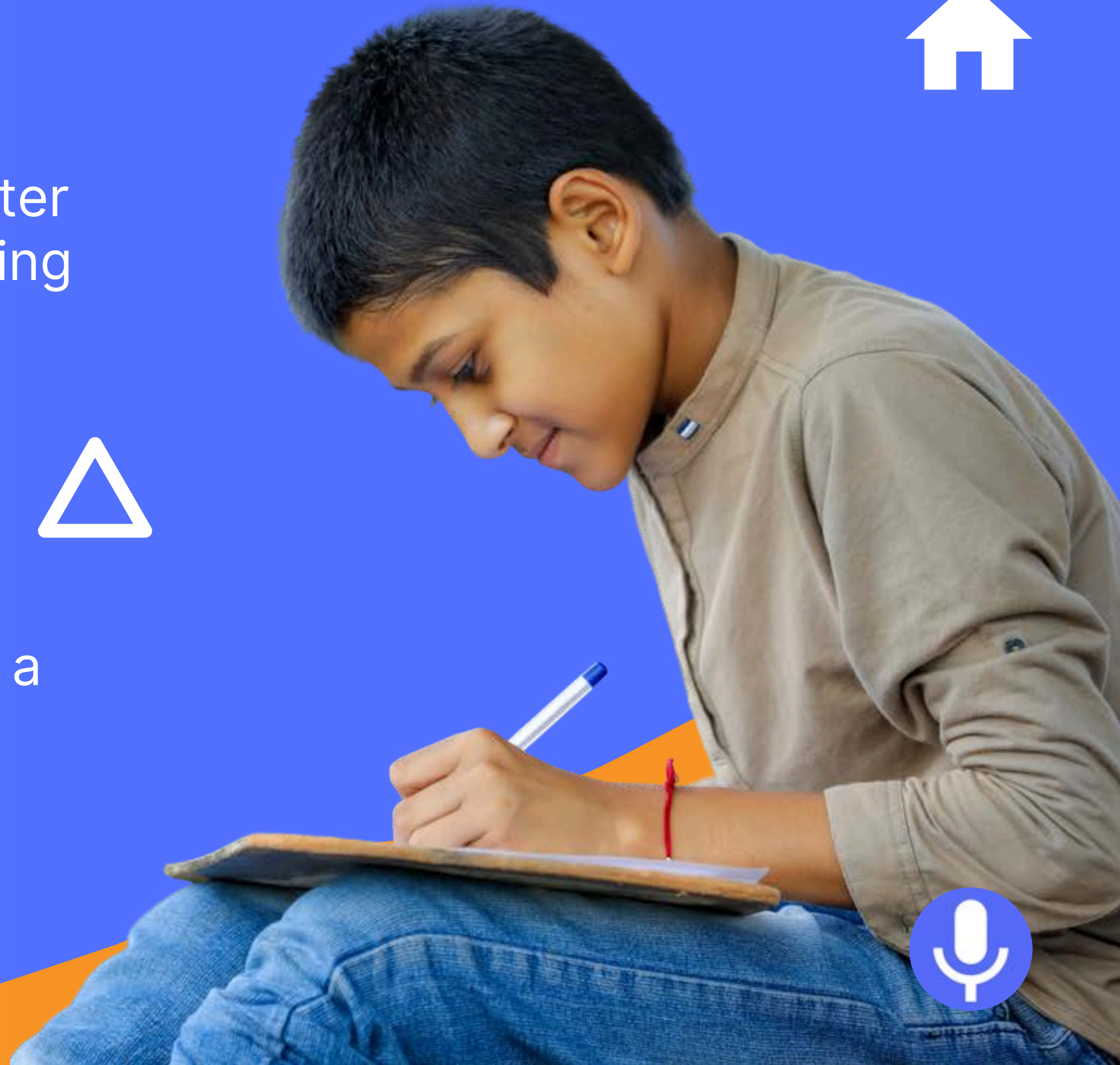


Before children are ready to learn letter formation, they need to master drawing the following 9 pre-writing shapes:



It's useful to practise these shapes in a variety of multi-sensory activities.

Pencil Skills 2 / 2



# SCISSOR SKILLS



It's useful to use a graded approach to learning scissor skills:

- Make sure both hands are in the 'thumbs up' position (thumb in the small hole and on top when cutting, thumb of supporting hand is on top of paper)
- Start by snipping playdoh
- Practise snipping short straight lines



# SCISSOR SKILLS

- Practise cutting along thick straight lines before progressing to curved lines and shapes
- Provide boundary lines and encourage your child to cut between the lines e.g. keep within the train tracks
- Use thick card which holds its shape before progressing to paper

Scissor Skills 2 / 3



# SCISSOR SKILLS

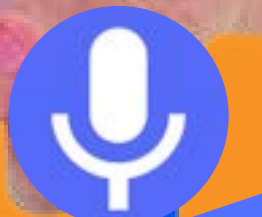


There are lots of different types of scissors available to make things easier:

Koopy scissors  
Peta Long Loop  
Peta Easy Grip

If your child is left-handed make sure they use left-handed scissors.

Scissor Skills 3 / 3



# CUTLERY SKILLS

Nana's Manners cutlery or Junior Caring cutlery can be helpful when teaching cutlery skills as they encourage children to hold their knife and fork with their index (pointing) fingers extended. This position will help develop stability when using their fork to stabilise food and using a sawing action with their knife to cut.



# CUTLERY SKILLS



Practise 'stabbing' with fork and 'sawing' with knife

- Use a non-slip mat to keep the plate still
- Practise cutlery skills outside of mealtimes to reduce frustration
- Use playdoh or soft foods e.g. a banana or Milkyway

Cutlery Skills 2 / 2



# ZIPS & BUTTONS



It's helpful to practise a variety of different fastenings such as zips, buttons and poppers.

- Practising on a table in front of your child will make it easier when they are learning
- Practise large fastenings before gradually progressing onto smaller fastenings

Fastening Skills 1 / 2



# ZIPS & BUTTONS

Once they have learnt the technique, see if they can do it with their eyes closed so they learn to feel what they are doing rather than relying on vision.



Fastening Skills 2 / 2

Have  
Fun!

