



Fine Motor Busy Box

Many children experience difficulties in the use of their hands for skilled manual dexterity tasks. They can appear clumsy and uncoordinated and often become frustrated due to their lack of skill. It can affect their ability to play purposefully with toys and age appropriate activities and can often prevent the development of their pencil skills. Tasks such as cutting out with scissors, eating skilfully with a knife and fork, using pencil sharpeners and rulers and being constructive with Duplo and Lego are often too difficult and the child avoids them. Children who use their hands poorly tend to drop things and knock them over causing disruption in the classroom and this has an effect on the child's self-esteem and confidence and his interaction with his peers.

Daily practise (little and often) and exposure (practise) of a selection of fine motor task will help children to develop the dexterity needed for functional tasks such as buttons and using a knife and fork Putting together a box of fine motor tasks that can be presented to the child/children as a warm up to task or when the child has some free play can be really helpful.

Use a selection of interesting containers to put the items in such as lunch boxes, Tupperware containers, purses, and zipped wallets, screw top jars. . Opening the containers is a fine motor task in itself and something that children with fine motor difficulties often struggle with.

Into the boxes put a selection of task that target activities designed to;

- Improve strength in the child's hands
- Increase tactile awareness and sensitivity
- Improve his dexterity and general co-ordination
- Improve his concentration and attention span
- Give the child enjoyment and confidence in his ability to be creative

The following are suggestions of activities that you could include in the boxes. Vary the tasks but make sure that you give the child plenty of opportunity to practise the skill and become proficient before changing or moving on.

As the child become more proficient with the task you could time them and see if the can beat the time it take them to complete the task. Children find that their dexterity often deteriorate with speed so it's good for them to practise the skill with speed.

Suggested Activities

Dexterity and co-ordination

- Threading activities – thread all sorts of things, buttons, beads, hula-hoops, macaroni, polo mints, straws cut up into pieces.
- Lacing games – vary the size of lace used.
- Finger painting – experiment using fingers, knuckles, sides of hands, heels of palms etc.



- Finger games – roll a dice and have the child isolate the same number of fingers.
- Nuts and Bolts
- Play games where you have to pick up objects using different fingers, thumb and index, thumb and little, index and middle fingers.
- Place a pile of play coins on the table. See how many the child can pick up using one hand only without dropping those already in his hand. Challenge him to see if he can collect more than you can.
- For the older child place a peg in the palm of his hand and ask him to move it up to his fingertips, using the one hand only, to place it into the pegboard. Repeat this as often as the child will allow.
- Place a piece of material on the table, using one hand only at a time practise collecting the material into the palm of the hand using all of the fingers and thumb.
- Lego or Duplo encouraging the child to put the piece together and pull them apart
- Jig saw puzzles (interlocking). You may need to sit with the child and help them put together the picture. Smaller piece puzzles will require more perceptual skills so help with the putting together of the picture if your focus is on the manipulative side of the task.
- Screwdrivers, meccano sets and advanced construction materials will help to develop his dexterity and confidence. The key is to be there with him as he tries so you can help him to overcome his difficulties and learn something new about what he is able to do.



Strength

- Tearing paper, especially stronger paper like sugar paper is good. The paper can be used to make paper machee. Balloons of different shapes can be used to plaster the paper machee onto and then painted and made into animals or other things.
- For a more advanced activity get the child to tear along a line you have made on the paper. Grade the line from straight to curved.
- Using a single hole punch (purchased from W H Smith) help the child to punch along the outside of a shape to make his own lacing card. If you use strong paper he can then lace the card when he has finished punching.
- Encourage the child to play with playdoh – rolling, squeezing, and squashing. Play a game – make food for dinner or animal shapes or letter shapes (whatever interests him) then collect up all the playdoh and squeeze it all into a ball again to start afresh.
- Use playdoh and make it into a ball and then make a hedgehog using cocktail sticks. Hold the cocktail sticks, one by one, firmly between your thumb and index finger and encourage your child to pull the stick away from you to place in the playdoh.



- Games played with clothes pegs are good for developing strength. Think of different ways of opening and closing the pegs – thumb and index, thumb and little finger and play a game where you pretend to hang washing on the line or clip pegs onto the animals tail (piece of cloth)
- Making nice collages which involve scrunching up paper to glue onto a bigger picture is a nice activity.
- Using a wet cloth which has to be rinsed and squeezed to get all of the water out.



Activities to improve stability of thumb joints

- Make a circle between thumb and index finger, with just your fingertips touching, try to prevent this circle being broken when; either you with your other index finger or a parent with their finger hooked through your circle tries to break the circle.
- As for No.1 make a circle, but this time have a piece of card/paper/ruler (something thin) between your fingertips. Squeeze fingers hard to try and keep it there whilst someone else tries to pull it away.
- With palm facing upwards, flex thumb across palm. Place a thin book etc between thumb and palm; try to keep this in place whilst someone tries to pull it away.
- Using playdoh or plasticine, roll out into a sausage shape then with thumb and index finger either side pinch them together hard until they meet, repeat along length of sausage.
- Holding a pencil in correct tripod grip, push pencil into plasticine. Ensure that correct grip is maintained.
- Use thumb to press drawing pins into a board – grade activity by resistance of board e.g. strawboard → wood.
- Hold a saucer or plate with thumb over the top of the plate, fingers fisted into palm beneath plate. Place items on the plate slowly upgrading the weight.
- Hold the pencil or chalk between thumb and index finger only. To keep 3rd/ 4th/ 5th fingers out of the way, use a rubber/ piece of plasticine that has to be held by these three fingers all the time you are writing. If possible write on an upright or sloping surface.
- Use thumb and index finger to open and close pegs. Activity can be graded by placing pegs on something-thin (paper) → something fatter. Also by working with a stable item e.g. the edge of a biscuit tin, to item in mid-air e.g. washing line.
- Wrap an elastic band around thumb and index finger, slowly stretch open and slowly close. Grade activity with thickness of elastic band or how many times it is wrapped around.

Tactile awareness and sensitivity

- Feely games are excellent
- Blindfold the child and get him to find objects in a bowl of rice/lentils. Grade the activity by the size of the object to be found.

- Place a small object in the child's hand and ask them to feel and identify using one hand only and without looking. (Coin, button, safety pin, paper clip, nuts, bolts, washers and screws, small toys such as cars etc etc.
- Choose two objects of similar shape e.g. coin and button, bolts and screws or safety pin and paper clip and place several of each into a box. The child must choose the objects they are going to collect and turns are taken to find the objects in the box. If they guess correctly then they keep the object, if not then they must put it back and wait for another turn. Use only one hand to explore and encourage the child to move the object around with their fingers.
- Play games where you exclude your child's vision (either use a blindfold or a card tunnel over the child's wrist so that he cannot see his hand). Tell the child that the top is near his nail and the bottom is near the palm. Touch different parts of the fingers and ask the child to identify if it is nearer the top or bottom.
- Exclude the child's vision. Take one of the child's fingers and have him touch a textured object e.g. cotton wool, sandpaper, fur etc. Ask them to identify which finger was the explorer and what the object was.



Some points to remember are:

The child may be unable to play purposefully or constructively on his own. Five or ten minutes spent alongside them each a day and helping them if they get stuck or frustrated may really help them to begin use their hands in a more constructive way.

Children with poor dexterity often compensate by using two hand together in a whole hand fashion or may manipulate items against their chest. For those activities that are not specifically bilateral (two-handed) in nature you may need to hold the child other hand or ask them to keep it on their head in order to force them to try more refined manipulative movements

Making the activities playful and fun is important.

Activities should be changed regularly as this helps keep them motivated.

Give the child a choice of what they would like to do from an array of activities that you know will be beneficial for them.

Use your imagination and do not rely on shop bought toys which often have no real play value.

Activities to develop and improve hand skills are often best rooted in everyday play, kitchen and garden type activities and not so much in exercises.

Older children should be encouraged to practice a range of tasks which will improve their dexterity. Little and often is best. Encourage the older child to time himself performing a range of tasks and compare his scores from the week to measure improvement.