

Preparing Little Hands for School



The following package contains ideas on how to encourage your child to develop the fine motor skills that they will need to get ready for school. Children who are 5 to 6 years old will have more advanced skills than children who are 4 to 5 years old (see Guide to Fine Motor Development).

When your child starts school it is useful if they can:

- Have good pencil control (see 'Pencil Control' and 'Tips for Left Handers').
- Draw a recognisable picture; the more detail the better (see 'Drawing').
- Cut along a line or around a simple shape (see 'Cutting' and 'Tips for Left Handers').
- Attempt to write their name (See 'Name Writing' and 'Foundation Font')
- Have good posture and strength to support their fine motor skills (see 'Posture and Strength')
- Be fit and have some sporting skills such as ball throwing (see 'Playground Play and Sporting Skills')
- Dress themselves, manage a packed lunch and look after their belongings (see 'Independent Self Care').



For further information contact your local Occupational Therapist at:

Bankstown Community Health Centre

02 9780 2777


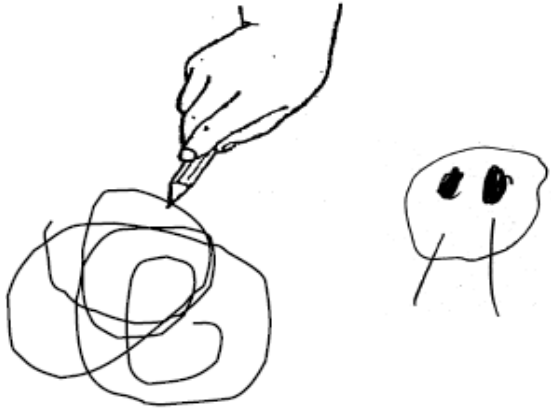
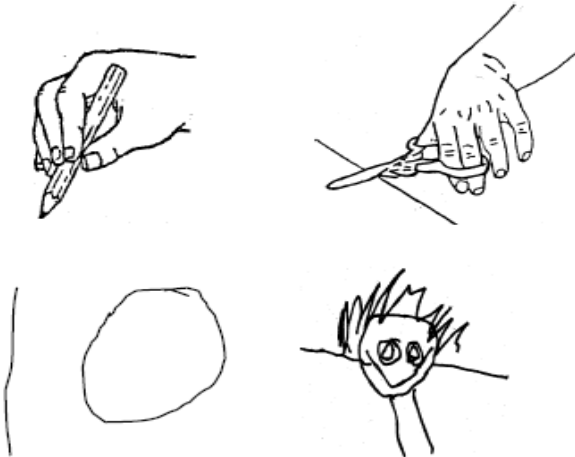


Fairfield Community Health Centre

02 9794 1739



GUIDE TO FINE MOTOR DEVELOPMENT

Pencil and scissor use develops in stages as children's brains and bodies develop. Experience and practice are necessary to develop the skilled use of these tools.

<p>1 – 2 years</p> 	<p>2 – 3 years</p> 
<p>3 – 4 years</p>  <p>Starting to show a clear hand preference</p>	<p>4 – 5 years</p> 
<p>5 – 6 years</p>  <p>Increased use of individual finger rather than whole hand movements</p>	



PENCIL CONTROL




✓ Pencil Control Checklist

- ☐ Children always use the same hand to write and the other hand to hold the paper.
- ☐ The pencil is held effectively – usually **pinched** between the thumb and index finger and resting on the middle finger.
- ☐ The little finger side of the hand **rests** on the paper.
- ☐ Pencil movement is starting to come from bending and stretching the **fingers** rather than moving the whole hand or arm.

Children may avoid name writing, colouring or drawing if it is hard for them to control the pencil. Try some of these activities to improve pencil control.

Developing a preferred hand

Sometimes children swap hands when they experience pain or tiredness.

- Encourage them to keep using the hand they start the drawing with. Stop the activity when they start to swap hands. 
- Gently shaking the hand is sometimes enough to give the hand a rest so they can continue for a few minutes more.
- Use thicker pencils or markers that may be easier to hold. 
- Use an easel or put paper on the fridge with magnets. This puts the wrist and fingers in a good position and is easier than drawing on a flat surface. 

Developing good pinch

Help your child to make a circle by touching the tip of the thumb to the tip of the index finger. Use this pinch to:

- Pinch along a play dough snake
- Tear paper into strips
- Play games using dice, counters and cards
- Pick up small toys (for example construction pieces)



Developing the resting side of the hand

Hold a coin in the palm with the little, ring and middle fingers while doing pinching activities.

Developing finger movement

- Sing songs or say rhymes that have finger actions (borrow a book from the library).
- Practise picking up 3 or 4 small objects



(coins) one at a time, move them into the palm, so all objects are held in the one hand. Move them back one at a time to the fingers for release (place coins one at a time into a money box).

- Roll small balls of play dough or crepe paper using the thumb, index and middle fingers.
- Pinch and sprinkle tiny things such as shredded coconut, sand or glitter.

If you are concerned about your child's pencil control contact an Occupational Therapist before your child starts school.



DRAWING



Try drawing in different positions

such as lying on the stomach or standing at an easel.

Draw using different materials

- Whiteboard markers on a whiteboard.
- Chalk on a blackboard or concrete.
- Bath crayons on the shower screen.
- Fingers in wet sand or mud.



Make pictures in different ways

- Make collages with different bits of coloured paper.
- Spray paint a picture using food colouring in a spray bottle (outside perhaps!).
- Use stamps, felt shapes or simple stencils.
- Paint with water on the fence using a large paint brush.



Do it together

- Draw at the same time as your child
- Copy what they draw, or
- Take turns adding to a picture.

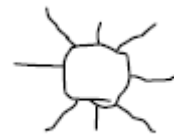


- Use simple lines and shapes that they can imitate, copy or draw. You need to draw at their level, so don't worry if you can't draw well!

Add detail



When drawing together say "I am going to add eyebrows/ears/fingers. What are you going to add?" You could also add rain, a sun, or a tree.



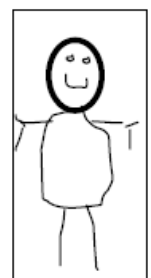
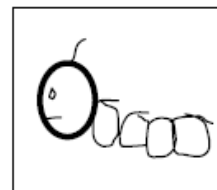
Stimulate ideas for drawing

Read a story or go on a walk and then draw a picture about it.



Give them a start

Start with a shape such as a circle or square and see how many different pictures can be made. Everyone in the family could draw a picture.



Display work that they like!



CUTTING

- Buy scissors with effective cutting blades.
- Supervise your child.
- Always use left handed scissors for left handers.

Develop a consistent grasp

- Help children to position their fingers. Say “put your thumb in the top loop and two fingers (index and middle finger) in the bottom loop”.
- Secure paper at the top (on an easel or with magnets on the fridge) so that children can practise cutting upwards, this helps to keep elbows in and forearm turned so that the thumb is on top.

Steps in developing cutting skills

✂ Develop (open\close) snipping action

- Use tongs to pick up objects (eg craft pom poms) and place them one at a time into a container.
- Practise opening the scissors wide “like a crocodile”.
- Practise snipping play dough sausages, thin strips of cardboard for a collage, or straws which can be used for threading.

✂ Develop a continuous cutting action

- Use firm paper about 10cm wide, with a straight thick cutting line. Stickers can be placed along the line to act as a guide.
- Remind them to open, push and then cut.
- Practise cutting up advertising flyers into small pieces.

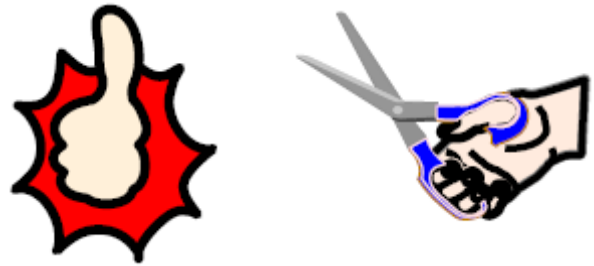
✂ Improve cutting accuracy

- Encourage cutting on different types of lines eg slightly wavy, thinner.
- Encourage children to practise turning the paper to change direction eg zig-zag lines or simple shapes. A square is the easiest.

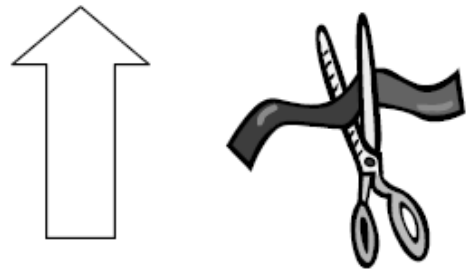


- As cutting improves encourage them to hold the paper with their thumb on top as this makes it easier to turn the paper.

Points to Remember



Thumbs on top



Scissor point forward away from the body



Keep scissor open when cutting



Use two hands. Turn the paper

Extra tips for cutting shapes

- Before cutting – stop and plan. The paper and scissors need to be well positioned before starting to cut.
- Right handers should cut around a shape in an anticlockwise direction (and left handers in a clockwise direction) so that they can see the cutting line.



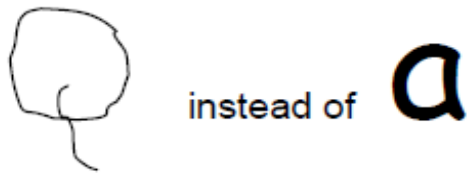


NAME WRITING

Development of writing takes time



At first children's names may look like this:
Some letters are harder than others for example **l** is easier than **e**. Children may simplify letters that are too hard such as:



This is a normal part of development.



Be encouraging

- ★ Ask them to write their name on cards or their pictures.
 - ★ Accept their attempts.
 - ★ Don't always correct them or they may become discouraged.
- ★ Practise skills at a different "special homework" time.

Practise forming letters

- Show children where letters start (see foundation font sheet).
- Trace letters in the air using their finger, or a piece of streamer stuck on a paddle pop stick.
- Rainbow tracing – you write a letter in a light colour and have them trace over it a number of times with different colours.
- Make feely letters by gluing fabric, rice, split peas or sand to large letters. Have them trace over them with their finger.
- You could also make letters out of play dough.



Make it easy

When you are writing a name for them to trace or copy use the foundation font that they will use at school (see sheet).

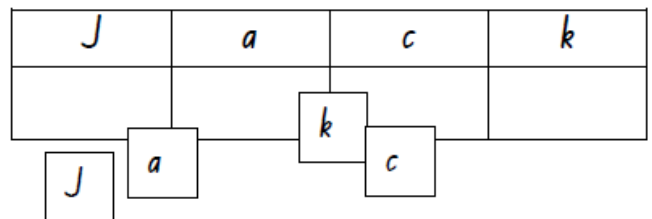


First letter CAPITAL, the rest lower case (small letters)

Keep a name tag handy (stuck on the fridge with a magnet) that they can use when they want to copy their name.

Make it fun

- Make a matching name game:



- Make name tags for the whole family and match them to pictures or use them as place cards.

More tips



Help your child to work out how to remember a letter – they may like to make up their own words to remember the movement (see foundation font sheet) or they may prefer to think of what it reminds them of – **S** looks like a snake.

- Make a tracing sheet – write their name in a light colour and place it in a plastic sleeve – they can trace over it as many times as they like using a whiteboard or washable marker.



Place a star or dot on the left hand side of the page so they know where to start.



FOUNDATION FONT

Letters are grouped according to the starting position and direction of the letter. This may be handy to keep for when they start to learn letters in Kindergarten.



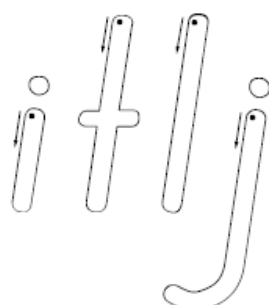
Roundabout Letters



"back around the circle"



Parachute Letters



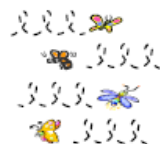
"down"



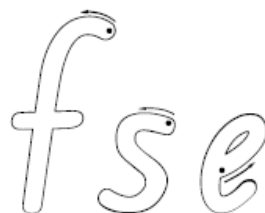
Slippery Dip Letters



"slide down" "across"



Curly Letters



"curl up and back"



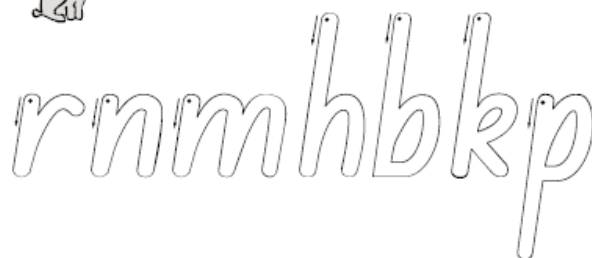
Diving Letters



"down and under"



Hopping Letters



"down, up and hop over"

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z



TIPS FOR LEFT HANDERS

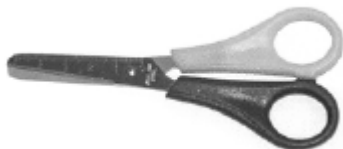
Why it may be harder?

- Left-handers see most other people doing things right handed.
- It is not natural for them to work from left to right.
- If they hook or bend their wrist to pull rather than push the pencil they cannot use their fingers well. Later this may cause them to be slower or experience pain when writing.
- They may smudge their work or have difficulty seeing what they are doing.



Tips For: Scissors

- Use only good quality left handed scissors. You may have to shop around. It is important to note that there are no scissors that work well for both left and right handed children.

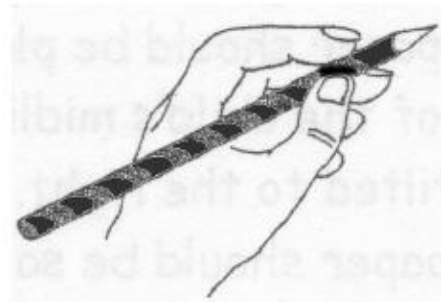


- Encourage your child to cut in a clockwise direction around a shape (opposite to a right hander). This helps them to see the cutting line clearly.



Tips For: Pencils

- **To straighten the wrist practise with paper on a sloped or vertical surface.** This places the wrist and fingers in a good position to develop efficient finger movements. For example, place paper on an easel, fridge door or slope board.



Help them to work from left to right

- Place a star or a mark on the left-hand side of the page so they know where to start. It is common for pre-school children to start on the right hand side of the page and reverse their work.



Help them to see what they are drawing and writing

- It may help to hold the pencil 3 – 4 cm from the end. A rubber band could be placed at the correct distance to act as a guide.
- When at a table it is important that the paper is placed at an angle suitable for left handers. Encourage your child to place their forearms on the table in a triangle shape. Line the paper up with the left arm, and then move the paper without changing the angle a little more to the left of the child. (Right handers line their paper up with their right arm.)





POSTURE AND STRENGTH

Develop sitting posture

Practise sitting at a table to play a board or card game so that children are able to sit at a table for 10 – 15 minutes. Sitting posture effects the way children use their hands. Encourage good posture, say:

*“Put your feet on the floor
Sit up straight and tall”*

Support their feet if necessary with a box or phone books.

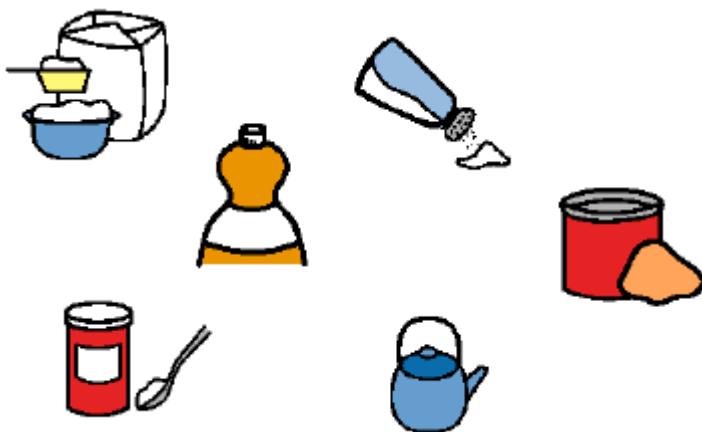
Increase hand strength

(Electronic games do not develop the hand muscles needed for everyday activities.)

- Try scooping water, rice or sand and holding as much as possible in the palm of the hand. Pour into different sized containers.
- Squeezing the trigger on a spray bottle.
- Scrunching newspaper into balls and throwing them into a box or basket.
- Squeezing plastic bottles in a bucket of water to create bubbles.
- Playing with play dough:
 - Squeeze, poke, pinch, roll, cut or press
 - Work drops of food colouring or glitter through a small ball of dough with one hand
 - Use cutters or a garlic press.

Play Dough Recipe

Mix 2 cups flour, 1 cup salt, 4 tablespoons cream of tartar, 2 table spoons cooking oil and 1¾ cups boiling water into a firm dough – keeps for months in a sealed container in the fridge.



Increase arm and shoulder strength

- Make fun obstacle courses where your child has to crawl and creep.
- Play wheelbarrows by holding your child's legs in the air while they move their hands across the ground.
- Play tug-of-war games with your child.
- Visit parks with climbing and swinging equipment.
- Play statue games where your child has to freeze in different positions.
- Set up a smaller clothesline so your child can hang out doll's clothes.
- Paint on a fence with water.
- Encourage lots of activities on easels. Try stickers, magnets, stamps, painting, drawing, felt boards and gluing.
- Try animal walks that place weight through the arms. Pretend to be a bear, a crab or a bunny.

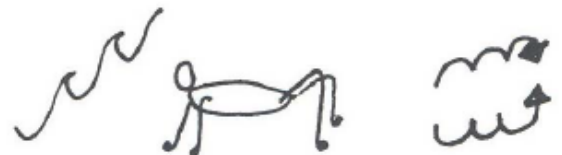
Bear walk:

Keep legs straight and weight bear by leaning forward through straight arms.



Crab walk:

Weight bear by leaning back through arms, keeping bottom in the air.



Bunny hop:

Weight bear though both hands in front and jump feet into hands.





PLAYGROUND AND SPORT SKILLS

Ball skills

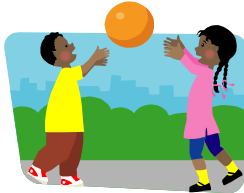
Ball activities require the eyes and parts of the body working together. Say “watch the ball with your eyes”.



If children are watching the ball with their eyes, their hands should move into position as the ball comes toward them. If necessary get them to put their hands in a scoop position well away from their face.

Catching

- Keep balloons in the air.
- Clap to burst bubbles.
- Practise catching a small cushion, soft toy or soft spiky ball as these are easier to grab on to. Count the number of successful catches. Set a target such as ten or twenty.
- As your child's skills improve try smoother and smaller balls, like a tennis ball.
- Increase the distance you throw the ball from, or try bouncing the ball before they catch it.
- Harder skills include: bouncing and catching the ball themselves or catching the ball with one hand.



Throwing

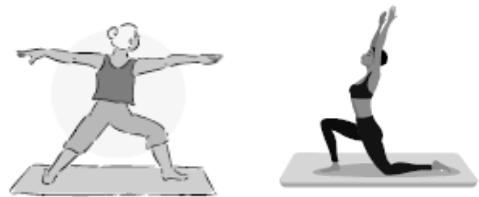
- Encourage your child to look “with their eyes” where they are aiming the ball.
- Throw beanbags (split peas tied into old socks), scrunched up paper or a ball into a target (a washing basket or box) or use a child sized basket ball hoop.
- See how many times you and your child can throw the ball to each other without dropping it.
- Teach overhand throwing. Have them point the non throwing hand toward the target then bring their ball hand over.

Find out what games are being played in the playground at your child's school so you can practise these skills.



Balancing and Movement Balancing

- Practise standing on one foot – set a target (a few seconds longer than they can do) and increase the target by 5 to 10 seconds when it is reached. Encourage them to look at something stationary in front of them at eye level.
- Try balancing in different positions (in yoga like poses). Try arms out to the side or above the head. Legs could be in front, out to the side or behind.



- Walk along a line or garden edge.

Move in different ways

- Walk backwards along a chalk or masking tape line.
- Walk sideways (bring feet together before taking the next step).
- Over obstacles (step over the cracks in the footpath or over cushions).
- Gallop (leading foot stays in front).
- Skip (step, hop on alternate feet).
- Hopping (try for 10 hops).
- Jumping with feet together (over chalk lines, off the bottom step or over a rope).
- Play games like hopscotch which uses hopping and jumping.



Physical Fitness

The Australian Government's physical activity recommendations are:

- Children and young people should participate in at least 60 minutes (and up to several hours) of moderate to vigorous intensity physical activity every day (running, jumping, climbing, dancing and skipping).
- Children and young people should not spend more than two hours a day using electronic media for entertainment (e.g. TV, computer games, Internet), particularly during daylight hours.



INDEPENDENT SELF CARE SKILLS

Children need to be as independent as possible so that they can get ready for school on time and manage their self care and belongings during the day.

Getting dressed tips



- Remove distractions (turn off the TV).
- Make time to let them practise. Let them dress and

undress at bath time. Give them specific tasks like putting on their underpants even when you are in a hurry in the mornings.

- Give them tips such as the “tag goes at the back”.
- Help them with hard bits for example you put the socks around on the right way and over their toes so they can successfully pull them up.
- Where possible choose clothes that are easy to put on for example elastic pants, soft stretchy socks, shoes with Velcro closures.
- Provide “dressing up” clothes with buttons so they can practise while they play.
- Help them to recognise when it is cold that they need to put on a jumper and when it gets hot they need to take it off.



Managing their belongings

Be encouraging when children remember to:



- Put away their belongings or
- Put their hat on before going outside.

Clearly label your child's belongings, including lids, so your child can easily recognise and care for them.

Shoelaces

Not all children will be ready to tie shoelaces when they start school. If they are interested:

- Always use the same method when tying laces
- Use 2 different colour laces when first learning



Practise with their shoes on their feet rather than on a shoe lacing card as this uses different movements.

Toileting tips



- Encourage them to start bottom wiping by letting your child tear off the toilet paper and do the last wipe and you do the harder bits in between. Gradually leave them more to do.

- Notice and comment when they wash their hands without being told.



Nose blowing

- Make sure they have their handkerchief or tissues ready.
- Encourage children to gently blow out of their nose by keeping their lips closed.



Eating a packed lunch

- Choose lunch boxes, sandwich wrappings and drink bottles that are easy to open and use.
- Go on picnics and practise eating a packed lunch.
- Don't be too quick to help your child with opening food packaging so they can develop the strength to do it themselves.



Self-care skills are hard and need practise.

Children who find it hard to do buttons, tie shoe laces, open packaging, blow their nose and wipe their bottom may also need to develop their hand skills (see pencil control and strength handouts).



Backpacks

Adjust back pack straps so they fit the body securely. A backpack should weigh less than 10% of a child's body weight.

