



Children's Treatment Network

Building Brighter Futures Together

Developing Fine Motor Manipulation Skills

The larger muscles that control finger movements are located in the forearm. There are smaller muscles in the hands that are responsible for controlling the movements needed to manipulate small objects.

Bilateral Integration: Most students use their dominant hand to manipulate objects (worker hand), and their non-dominant hand to stabilize objects (helper hand). When both hands work together on a task, it is called bilateral integration.

- Nuts and bolts – Use both hands to twist nut on and off the bolt.
- Stringing beads – Try starting with a thicker and/or sturdier string (e.g. pipe cleaners, plastic lacing, laces, etc.) and large beads with larger openings. Use one hand to hold the bead while the other hand threads the lace through the bead. As this skill is mastered, consider using a thinner string and/or smaller beads.
- Links – Begin by creating a chain of links for the student and ask them to separate the links. The student will have to identify and match the openings on two side-by-side links before pulling them apart. The next step is to have the child create a chain of links. With one link in each hand, the child will have to match the openings of the two links before trying to push them together.
- Mr. Potato Head – Use the helper hand to hold the base, while using the worker hand to insert the facial features and body parts. Any similar game will work.

Separation of the sides of the hand: The hand is divided into the working side (thumb, index and middle fingers) and the stabilizing side (ring and pinky fingers). The working side of the hand completes most of the manipulation of smaller objects. The stabilizing side remains curled into the palm of the hand.

- Placing a pom pom under the ring and pinky finger to keep them curled into the palm of the hand.
- Using tongs to pick up small objects like pom poms, marbles, beads.
- Opening and closing small jars — salad dressing container, ketchup bottle, round lid on milk carton.
- Creating a line of standing dominoes.
- Sorting small items into and out of egg cartons or ice cube trays.
- Colouring/dot-to-dot tasks while keeping a pom pom/cotton ball under the pinky and ring fingers.

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Pincer grasp and finger isolation: The pincer grasp is formed between the thumb and index finger with the remaining fingers curled into the palm of the hand. In the beginning, children will pinch with the pads of their fingers. The finer pincer is formed by using the tips of the fingers as it for the most precise movements and manipulation of very small objects.

- Sorting coloured beads on a flat surface
- Keyboarding/piano
- Spinning tops
- Travel size games (e.g. mini Connect Four)

In-hand manipulation: This is the ability to move objects within the hand without putting it down or using the other hand.

- Walking the fingers up and down a pencil. Starting by how you would hold your pencil to write and working toward the eraser end; and then back again.
- Putting hand held coins into a piggy bank. Start by picking up one coin at a time and putting it in a slot. Progress to having the child hold 2-3 coins in their hand and try to insert one coin at a time without dropping the others.
- Practice twisting knobs/handle of wind-up toys.

Online resources:

[An OT Mom](#)

[OT Mom Learning Activities](#)

[Therapy Fun Zone](#)

[Therapy Street for Kids](#)

[Fine Motor: In-hand Manipulation](#)

[Fine Motor: Finger Isolation](#)

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