



Children's Treatment Network

Building Brighter Futures Together

Developing Skills with Fasteners & Containers

The ability to manage fasteners (clasps, zippers, buttons, etc.) and containers (jars, boxes, cases, etc.) requires both hands working together. This can be very challenging for some children. It is important to talk with them about the job each hand should perform. The “worker hand” is typically their dominant hand and the “helper hand” is used more for support or stabilization. A pincer grasp or “tip to tip” pinch is necessary for success with many of these tasks. Hand strength also plays a role. It is also important to break the tasks down into smaller steps.

IF YOU SEE:

Child needing help with buttons.

TRY THIS:

- Provide opportunities for the child to play with bingo chips, loose buttons, pennies, etc.
 - Encourage the child to pick them up with the index finger and thumb of their dominant hand promoting a tip to tip pinch.
 - Use an empty coffee can with a hole cut in the plastic lid and have the child put the buttons or coins through the hole.
 - Next have the child hold the lid upright in one hand while passing the button or coin through the opening with other the hand – they will have to switch hands to manage the lid and pull the coin with the other hand.
- Work towards managing larger buttons on a jacket or vest using this same finger positioning:
 - Practice unbuttoning and then move onto buttoning once they can easily undo buttons as this is a more difficult task.
 - Start by having the child complete the last step of pulling the button through the hole, after the helping adult has started the process by pushing the button into the hole.
 - Gradually work backwards in the task, adding more steps that the child is responsible for.
- Use the verbal cues PINCH, POKE, PULL to describe the movements involved.
- Practice buttoning up a shirt or vest while it is lying on the child's lap or table in front of them before trying on a shirt that they are wearing. Next, move to working on buttons on clothing that the child is wearing. Stand behind the child to provide physical assistance as needed.



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IF YOU SEE:

Child needing help with zippers.

TRY THIS:

- Tip to tip pinch is needed to manage zippers properly. Work on activities such as stringing beads or lacing cards – be sure the child is using the tips of their index finger and thumb for these types of activities.
- When working on managing a zipper:
 - Start by having the child pull up the last part of a zipper once it has already been connected and zipped half way up.
 - Then encourage the child to hold the zipper firmly and pull up the full length of the zipper once it has already been connected at the bottom.
 - Next, have the child work on joining the zipper parts. Some hand-over-hand help may be needed to ensure success initially. Stand behind the child when giving this kind of help.
- Remind the child that once the zipper is connected at the bottom, they must hold it in place with one hand, while pulling up with the other.
- Try attaching a keychain to the zipper to make it easier when pulling up if the child has a hard time with the “tip to tip” pinch needed for smaller zippers.

IF YOU SEE:

Child needing help to open containers.

TRY THIS:

- Ensure the child's lunch bag is large enough to hold all items without any struggle when zipping it up.
- Snip corners of pre-packaged foods to make it easier for child to open at school.
- Encourage tip to tip pinch when opening ziptop bags or prepackage foods.
- Use easy open plastic containers for lunch storage.
- Store toys small toys or objects in empty plastic jars, containers or ziptop bags to encourage practice opportunities with these types of containers.
- Provide opportunities to work on finger strengthening activities (e.g. opening and closing velcro, playing with putty or play dough, manipulating clothespins, etc.) this will increase independence

Online resources:

[The Tool Box](#)

[Mama OT](#)

[The Inspired Treehouse](#)

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