**Developing motor skills – hand skills**

**How to help your child with play and hand skills at around the 1 to 2 year level**

At this age children will have a variety of movement skills including crawling, standing and walking and fairly well developed early hand skills.  Play interests will expand and it is important to continue to spend lots of time talking with your child as you play and go about everyday activities.  Try to provide toys and activities that let your child use their skills in manipulation and hand eye co-ordination.

* Encourage neater and more accurate grasps with toys that need to be fitted together like pop – up animals, pans and lids, nesting cups.
* Toys with smaller features that create music or light up will help encourage poking and starting to turn buttons.
* Posting boxes and large single shape posting toys, stacking toys help children develop better placement skills.  Toys with balls to place into chutes or cars with tracks or any toys that encourage repetitively placing objects inside them to make something happen.
* Stacking toys like blocks, nesting cups to build up and knock down are fun.  You can use empty yoghurt pots, margarine tubs and boxes.
* Encourage looking at books with pictures to point to and think pages to turn. Learning to hold a book and the turn the pages is important even if it is more than one page at a time. Thick cardboard books, cloth books and bath books are nice and easy to handle.
* Children begin to use everyday objects to copy adult activities and self care routines. They begin to pretend to give dolly a drink, brush Mum's hair, stir a wooden spoon in an old pan or put teddy to bed.
* At bath time they will enjoy washing dolly's feet, tummy or face with sponges. Playing with household plastic jugs, empty shampoo bottles, small cups and other bath toys to encourage reaching and grasping.
* Singing simple action rhymes and playing finger games may be enjoyed, things like incy wincy spider, this little piggy and round & round the garden are enjoyable.
* Children begin to take an interest in scribbleing using chubby crayons or pencils. They may prefer to copy you scribbling first and make this into a turn-taking game.
* As children begin to stand and walk they will like to use the furniture to cruise along sideways.
* They might also enjoy using a trolley of bricks or a small pram. You can add extra weight to keep it steady using a bag filled with sand or something similar.
* Children begin to enjoy sitting on a low stool or children's chair and practising standing up and sitting down again.
* They may like to carry around big soft toys, empty boxes, balls and cushions and this will help to develop balance.

**How to help your child with play and hand skills at around the 2 to 3 year level**

At this age children will be developing more sophisticated play with early construction, beginning to use two hands together with more control and starting to pick a favourite hand for activities like feeding or scribbling.  They will be showing more interest in pretend play, and will enjoy playing alongside other children.

Children begin to enjoy a wider variety of messy play with sand, water, paints, gloop and gluing to develop interest in touching and using different textures as well as developing skills in drawing and constructing.

Children need to experience toys and activities that encourage both hands to develop good manipulative skills and also require both hands to work together.

Threading toys like cotton reels, big button or beads.  Using thick cords or stiffened laces might help to start or even pipe cleaners or straws.  Other toys that need to be held in one hand and operated by the other hand like wind-up toys, toys with a pull string will help develop two hand skills and help the child to decide on a favourite hand.

A favourite hand may be seen when feeding or scribbling and it will be the hand used to operate the more difficult features of a toy.  Some children are much later at developing a favourite hand and having lots of these type of play experiences will help.

At this stage you should not be concerned if your child does not appear to be developing a favourite hand.

Scribbling and construction will become more controlled.  Circular scribbles and dots will develop first and then straight lines will be part of their drawings before anything recognisable is seen.  ‘Drawing’ can be done with water on a brush on a surface, a stick in sand, finger paints and chalks as well as crayons and pens. Simple tearing and cutting activities with safe children’s scissors to make pictures and collages will be enjoyable.  Children enjoy gluing and painting with bits and bobs of household materials to make junk models.  It is important to talk to your child about their drawings, paintings and models, to encourage them by joining in and admiring their attempts but not directing them too much.

Simple construction toys like building blocks, duplo, and big meccanno help to develop manipulation and children will start to tell you what they are building even if it is not always recognisable. Again it is important to admire and praise your child’s attempts.

More complicated peg puzzles, shape posting boxes and simple jigsaws will help to improve hand control and develop understanding of shape.  Colour matching games, toys and books will be of interest to your child as they begin to match red, blue, green and yellow and perhaps name one or two of them.

Children begin to enjoy simple stories, picture books and nursery rhymes.  Encourage pointing to and finding things on the page and talking about the pictures and stories.  Nursery rhymes with finger actions are good to develop hand skills.

As children develop better language skills pretend play starts to develop with dolls, dolls houses, toy telephones, cars and garages, trains.  Pretend play with old kitchen jugs, pans etc, empty cereal boxes and washed out yoghurt pots will begin as well as copying domestic activities like washing up and dusting.

They might be interested in other children and want to play alongside them but might not yet be able to share or play together.  They will enjoy singing games, nursery rhymes, music making and play, but will often look to an adult for support.  Crèche, two’s groups and playgroups will provide a good setting for this social play.

**How to help your child with play and hand skills at around the 3 to 5 year level**

At this age children will have become quite independent and creative in their play.  They are showing an interest in making, imagining and understanding things around them.  Their hand skills are now well developed and they will be able to use tools like scissors, fork and knife, washcloth, hairbrush and toothbrush with increasing independence and skill.  Play becomes linked to skills needed for successful achievement at school. Your child’s play has been helping them to develop their ability to attend, problem solve, create and socialise with their peers, which will be important as they enter their first school setting.  Their play interests will determine what they enjoy and will want to do ‘for fun’ in the future.

Activities to develop construction and creativity are important and may include:

* Any drawing activities using things like wet sand and a stick, finger paint, fingers in shaving foam, drawing with paint dabbers, chalk or sponge brush with water on the pavement or a chalk board, as well as crayons, pencils and felt pens.  Your child might like to copy shapes like circles, square or a cross.  Once they can do this they may copy letters for their name and begin to draw recognisable pictures like a face and then a person with a body.  This type of creating can occur in other ways too such as playing with felt shapes, peel off or plastic sets that have body parts or familiar children’s characters.
* Construction with things like play dough or biscuit dough using safe tools like a blunt knife, potato masher, garlic press, rolling pin, biscuit cutters.  You can help your child make recognisable figures with dough, using kits that are available or something like Mr Potato Head pieces to help your child decide where the features should go.  Other construction activities like junk modelling, building blocks, duplo, brio and stickle bricks will all help develop imagination and building skills.  Don’t forget to encourage messy construction too with paper, scissors, glue and interesting things like shells, dried pasta shapes, leaves and magazine pictures.
* Pretend play is important and is especially fun to do so with peers now.  This type of play may now become quite complicated with invented people and objects.  Children might copy characters seen on TV or in books and may enjoy dressing up in play clothes like a doctor or princess as well as old grown up clothes.  Encourage pretend play with Wendy house and shops, dressing up, small figures, animals and vehicles in play settings.  Other dolls like action man with clothes and accessories, pretend food and tools.
* Books and music are becoming more meaningful and more complicated books will be appreciated, perhaps with flaps to lift and longer stories.  Listening to and making music will develop your childs sense of rhythm and timing for movement skills.  All these activities help develop important communication skills and can help teach social skills and life skills for example ‘this is the way we (wash our face) song’ reinforces self-care skills.
* Puzzles and toys can now become more complicated eg jigsaw puzzles with more parts.  Toys and games can now have smaller features or pieces that further develop their hand skills and hand eye co-ordination.
* Board games and more organised movement activities will become a favourite pastime and will involve more co-operative play with peers.  Games like dominoes, snakes and ladders and ludo develop hand eye co-ordination as well as teach sharing, turn taking and develop positive competition skills with peers and family.  Movement games like skittles, ball games, Simon says will also develop these skills as well as strength and co-ordination.