



OT Mom Learning Activities



Your Child's Fine Motor Skills

Once formal schooling starts, good fine motor abilities enable the child to learn handwriting with a minimum of effort. We know that children who struggle in the early years of school often end up with a negative attitude to learning and don't live up to their potential in school. And none of us want that experience for our kids!

When your child has to **concentrate** on holding and using his pencil, he has less brainpower to devote to actually learning the work! When a child can write freely and easily, it is easier for him/her to concentrate on writing a great essay, answering the exam questions etc.

In order for fine motor skills to develop, there are four **Essential Bases** that need to be in place.



Think of your child's fine motor development as a 4-legged chair.

Each leg of the chair represents one of the bases for fine motor skills. When one of those legs is missing, or misshapen, the stool will wobble and topple over.

Each of the legs has to be in place in order for the stool to be stable.

So, let's have a look at the 4 Essential Bases for Fine Motor Skills

1) **Postural Base**

This refers to the bigger muscles of the shoulders and trunk that stabilise the arm so the fingers are free to move.

Trying to use a pencil or scissors while the big muscles aren't strong or stable is like trying to paint while on a wobbly stepladder. It takes huge amounts of effort, is extremely tiring and the results are usually lousy. So, in order to control the small muscles in the hand, the bigger muscles of the trunk and shoulders need to "hold steady".



When this base is shaky, a child could hold his pencil really tightly to give himself a firmer base, or press really hard on the paper as he does not have enough control over it, or tense up at the shoulders and then he gets tired easily.

Activities such as climbing (trees, jungle gyms, climbing walls), monkey bars, crab walk, tummy crunches can help to strengthen the shoulder girdle and the core trunk muscles for this essential base. Find photos and detailed instructions for fun shoulder and core exercises at www.ot-mom-learning-activities.com/shoulder-exercises-for-kids.html or www.ot-mom-learning-activities.com/core-exercises-for-kids.html





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2) Touch Perception Base (Also known as tactile perception).



If you are not getting good feedback from your fingers, it is hard to be accurate with them. You know how strange dishes feel when you are wearing rubber gloves to wash them? It is hard to tell which piece of cutlery you are washing if you can't see it. You would not know if you were washing your wedding silver or your everyday fork until you looked at it.

When a child has a poor touch perception base, it feels like he is doing everything with rubber gloves on. There is probably not anything wrong with the nerves in his hand, but his brain is not processing the information from his hands properly.

So perhaps he is really clumsy, always dropping small items, letting things slip out of his grasp. Maybe he squeezes the pencil really tightly so he can "feel" it properly to control it.

Does this sound like your child? Try hiding some objects or shapes in a bag or in sand and asking your child to identify them without looking. Or visit www.ot-mom-learning-activities.com/tactile-perception-activities.html for more ideas with photos to help you!



3) Hand and Finger Muscles Base

This base sounds really obvious, but it often gets missed. Your child's hand muscles need to be strong and coordinated in order to cope with using a pencil and other fine motor tasks.

Scissor cutting is a wonderful activity to develop the muscles of the hands and there are some great scissor cutting tips and activities available on www.ot-mom-learning-activities.com/scissor-cutting.html



Kids with poor fine motor skills probably hate writing and drawing. So you need activities that don't have a pencil in sight! Try those found at www.ot-mom-learning-activities.com/hand-exercises-for-kids.html

4) Bilateral Coordination Base

This is the ability to use the two sides of the body together in a coordinated way. It may seem like a strange base when we are talking about fine motor skills, but if your hands don't work well together, simple tasks like tying your shoelaces, cutting with scissors, and tightening a bolt will be tricky for you.



Rolling and kneading playdough is a great bilateral coordination activity. For more ideas, look at www.ot-mom-learning-activities.com/bilateral-coordination.html

Have fun with your child as you try these activities!!

