

Fine motor skills: Manipulation



What is it?

Fine motor skills are movements that involve intricate and skilful use of the hands and fingers. Manipulation refers specifically to the ability to pick up and position objects using your hands.

Manipulation skills are important as they are essential to the effective completion of many of the activities children complete at both home and school, such as playing (threading, construction, pegs, craft), dressing (buttons, zips, Velcro), feeding (using cutlery) and using tools (pencil and scissors).

Children with reduced manipulation skills may:

- Be slow when completing fine motor activities
- Appear awkward or drop objects frequently
- Often use two hands for tasks when only one is required
- Try to avoid fine motor activities
- Have difficulty competing pencil and scissor tasks with reasonable control
- Display reduced ability to complete self-care tasks independently (relevant to age)

5 key ideas:

- Provide lots of opportunities for manipulation activities
- Ensure appropriate positioning at the desk to create a good base of support for fine motor activities
- Make manipulation tasks more challenging by having child hold a small object within their hand whilst lifting another, then another! Then reverse, releasing the small objects one at a time from the palm.
- Give lots of praise to children for attempting manipulation activities
- Consider compensatory strategies to encourage success such as adaptive scissors or modify tasks depending on the learning intention

Strategies for the classroom and home:

- Complete warm up exercises before activities that use the hands:



Push palms together really hard!

Make sure elbows are at right angles to wrists. Hold for a count of 5. Slowly release. Repeat 5 times.



Pull hands apart as hard as possible!

For a count of 5. Release. Shake out hands. Repeat 5 times.



Give yourself a big tight hug!

Hold for a count of 5. Release and give arms and hands a big shake out. Repeat 5 times.



Reach up high!

Stretch one arm up and then the other. Draw circles in the air. Repeat the sequence 5 times.

- Provide lots of opportunities for fine motor activities:
- Playdough and clay play
 - rolling out with both hands
 - pinching along with thumb and index finger
 - squeezing with both hands
 - rolling small pieces into balls between fingers
 - flattening small pieces onto table using index finger
 - pulling objects from the dough e.g. small pegs
- Construction activities
 - Hammering activities
 - Assembling nuts and bolts (with screw driver or by hand)
 - Building games in which objects must be pushed together and pulled apart e.g. Lego/ duplo/ stickle bricks, K-nex
 - Jigsaws
- Art and craft activities



- collages – tearing paper into pieces and sticking down
- scrunching paper into small balls to form pictures e.g. tissue paper pictures
- make pictures by squeezing paint through an eye dropper
- model making
- stencils
- pipe cleaner modelling



- Dressing up games
 - have a variety of dressing up clothes which have large buttons/ zips to allow for practice of fastening
- General play activities
 - Activities requiring the manipulation of small objects such as paper clips, clothes pegs, beads
 - Threading or lacing
 - Using tongs or tweezers to pick up small objects
 - Pegs and pegboard activities
 - Posting games – letters into a box, coin into a money box
 - Card games e.g. Snap

Activity ideas for home:

- Playdough/clay/plasticine – roll it out with hands, use cutters, pull small pieces off and roll into balls
- Clothes pegs – place pegs around the edge of a container, or hang socks on a play clothes line
- Finger football – tear off small pieces of paper, crumple them up, and use fingers to flick them toward ‘goals’
- Tweezer games – use tweezers to pick up buttons/cotton wool balls/ dried peas etc
- Threading – beads/buttons of different sizes, pasta shapes, etc.
- Cut straws into smaller pieces
- Bubble wrap – burst the bubbles on a sheet of bubbles wrap
- Household activities e.g. using a spray bottle to water plants, ripping up junk mail, help with baking tasks etc
- Commercially available games e.g. Operation, Connect 4, Hungry Hippos, Jenga

