

Fine Motor Development 0 to 6 Years

THE DEVELOPMENT OF FINE MOTOR SKILLS

When most people think of their child's growth & development they can remember the ages at which their child first rolled, crawled, or walked. How many can recall the age at which they picked up small items between their thumb & index finger, or transferred objects from one hand to another?

Gross motor skills are large movements that an individual performs with most of their body. For an infant they include rolling, crawling, & walking. For older children & adults, gross motor skills include balance, walking, running, jumping, etc. The development of gross motor skills is easy to identify in young children and are the skills most people think of when asked about their child's development.

Fine motor skills are the manner in which we use our fingers, hands, & arms. They include reaching, grasping, manipulating objects & using different tools like crayons & scissors. But because tasks such as printing, colouring & cutting are not emphasized until a child is of preschool age, fine motor skill development is frequently overlooked when the child is an infant or toddler.

Just as gross motor skills begin to develop on the first day of life, so do fine motor skills. The following is a brief description of fine motor development from 0 months through 6 years. However, we must remember that newborns, infants, & toddlers are individuals just like us. As some of us learn new skills quicker than others, the following information should be used only as a

general guide. If your child is not able to do some of the skills at the stated age, it does not mean that they are delayed. It may help to think of an average child as being capable of tasks in a range that encompasses some of the skills above & below those indicated for their age. However, if you are concerned, consulting your family Doctor or a healthcare professional such as an Occupational Therapist, may help with determining if your concern is significant.

0 to 4 Months

Between 0 & 4 months, your baby will move their arms & hands together to bat at objects or visual stimuli. The control & use of their right & left arms will be the same. Your child will also develop the ability to move their eyes & head in a coordinated manner from side to side. This skill is required for your baby to further develop their fine motor abilities. For example, a baby of this age may turn their head from left to right in response to the sound of their Mother's voice. Between 2-3 months your child will begin to reach for objects and hold them in the middle of his/her body. Their grasp is reflexive at this age, so they will not be able to purposefully release objects they are holding.

4 to 12 Months

During this period, your baby will gain more control over their arms & progress from reaching with both hands to reaching with one hand. Voluntary movement emerges & the baby will become capable of grasping & holding objects. Around 4 months they will only be able to squeeze objects & hold them in a closed fist. By about 6 months your baby will begin to pick up small

items like raisins and by 12 months they will pinch & hold small objects between their thumb & index finger as adults do. In addition, your child will transfer objects from one hand to the other and be able to release objects from their grasp voluntarily. Your baby's visual skills continue developing during this stage. Initially they will learn to coordinate their head & eyes to move up & down

together. Soon afterwards they will watch their reach and eventually be able find an object visually, and then purposefully reach for it. During play at 12 months your child will make marks with crayons & markers, stack rings & blocks, turn pages & roll a ball.

1-2 Years

Your child's sitting balance & trunk control will improve to the point that they no longer need to use their arms for support. They will be able to sit unsupported while using their hands for play. At this age, hand & arm use is characterized by the whole arm moving together & both arms being used equally. However, as the child approaches 2 years of age, the emergence of a hand preference may be demonstrated by one hand initiating activity more often than the other. Their hand preference is beginning to emerge at this age but not yet established. As a result, the child will frequently alternate hands for leading activities.

Hand use will also change dramatically. The child will begin to move fingers independently of other fingers. This may be evident in the ability to poke bubbles or point at objects. When colouring with crayons, your child will use whole arm movements to colour & will hold

Visit Us Online at:
www.skillbuilderonline.com

Occupational Therapy
Skills for the job of living.

Email Us at:
info@skillbuilderonline.com

Fine Motor Development 0 to 6 Years

the crayon in a closed fist with their thumb pointing up (see Figure 1). Usually by 2 years of age your child's colouring should progress from circular scribble to either horizontal or vertical scribble.

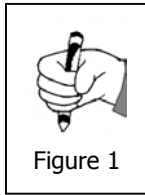


Figure 1

2 to 3 Years

During this stage of development, your child's balance & trunk stability should allow them to maintain their posture when they reach away from their body or shift their weight to one side. During hand use, less shoulder movement will be observed and more movement will occur at the elbow. Hand dominance will continue to emerge but not yet be established. During activities such as opening a jar, one hand will clearly be leading the activity (the hand turning the lid) & the other hand will be assisting (the hand holding the jar). The child will also continue to alternate lead & assist roles between right & left hands.

When drawing, your child will hold the crayon or pencil with their fingers pointing towards the paper. Such a grasp is called a pronated pencil grasp (see Figure 2). They will become capable of drawing horizontal & vertical lines, & eventually circles after watching someone else draw them first. The ability to draw a shape after watching someone else draw it first is called imitation. As the child approaches 3 years of age, they should be able to draw horizontal & vertical lines & eventually circles after being shown a picture of the form. This is called

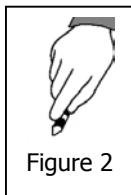


Figure 2

copying. Children will always be able to imitate a shape or form before being able to copy it.

How about scissors? At 2 years, the child will use both hands to open & close scissors. By 3 years they should be able to snip paper with the scissors in one hand & eventually cut a piece of paper into 2 pieces. Cutting along lines would not be expected at this age.

3 to 4 Years

Your child will have a strong preference for a lead/dominant hand, but switching continues. When drawing, the lead hand will be holding the crayon while the assist hand is stabilizing the paper. Your child will progress from being able to copy lines & circles to imitating crosses (+) & tracing over triangles & diamonds. The child will attempt to colour within the lines but with limited success. By 4 years of age, your child should be holding the crayon with three fingers (see Figure 3). The crayon will be pinched between their thumb & index finger & resting on their middle finger. This is called a tripod pencil grasp & is the manner in which most adults hold a pen or pencil. It is also called a mature or efficient pencil grasp.

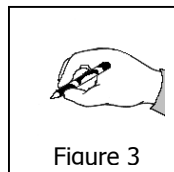


Figure 3

During cutting, your child should be able to move the scissors in a forward direction & cut along a straight line. When cutting simple curves like an S shaped line, the assist hand should begin to turn the paper to assist with cutting around a curve.

4 to 5 Years

During this stage hand use is characterized by refined wrist & finger movement & decreased elbow & shoulder movement. During drawing, a combination of finger & wrist movement should be observed. Hand dominance is typically established between 4 & 6 years, so a hand preference should be apparent & consistent. As a result, the skill of the dominant hand should begin to exceed the skill of the non-dominant hand. During colouring, the child will become capable of staying within the lines as well as copying crosses, diagonal lines & squares using a tripod pencil grasp. When cutting, the child will make smaller more precise cuts & be able to cut out a square. The scissors should be positioned perpendicular to the floor, pointing away from the child's body, and the scissors are held in a thumbs-up position.

5 to 6 Years

Both hands should work together. The roles of the right & left hands should be easily identified as dominant & non-dominant, or lead & assist. During pencil use, a tripod grasp should be established and the child should be able to copy crosses, triangles & diamonds. Small precise finger movement should be observed during colouring. When using scissors, the child should be able to hold them in a mature fashion.

Please refer to the therapeutic activities, crafts & games section of our website for fun ways & ideas to further develop your child's fine motor skills.

www.skillbuildersonline.com

Copyright © 2002 Skill Builders. All Rights Reserved.

Visit Us Online at:
www.skillbuildersonline.com

Occupational Therapy
Skills for the job of living.

Email Us at:
info@skillbuildersonline.com