

# Fine Motor Development



Fine Motor Development does not happen in isolation from other skills. As with all areas of child development, a lag or delay in one area can impact on other areas of development.

- Some activities USE Fine Motor skills. In other words, you need fine motor skills in order to DO them.
- Other activities DEVELOP Fine Motor skills. That means they work on the underlying Essential Bases that make fine motor skills possible.

## What kind of activities merely USE fine motor skills?

Colouring in, pencil-and-paper work, building model airplanes, some construction toys, craft work, and threading beads are some of them.



If a child's fine-motor skills are good,

- A child is able to do these fine motor skills activities
- A child will actually enjoy them as they get a great end product
- They are able to complete them if they are not too complicated for the amount of time

HOWEVER, if a child's fine-motor skills are poor,

- They may get tired easily and give up;
- Their 'clumsy' fingers may keep missing and they give up
- or a parent/teacher may get frustrated at their messy work, and they give up.
- and because they give up, their fingers don't get the practice they need.

In order for fine motor (FM) skills to develop, there are four essential areas which need to be developed.

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- Postural Control
- Tactile Perception
- Bilateral Coordination
- Hand Function

## Postural Control

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

Trying to use a pencil or scissors without adequate stability of the large shoulder girdle and trunk muscles 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.”

## 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, and so fine motor development is not optimal.

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.

## Bilateral Coordination

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.

## Hand Function

This is the fourth Essential Base for fine motor skills, because the muscles of the hand need to learn to work well together to control pencils and other small objects. Closely related to that are wrist and forearm position, as the wrist and forearm get the hand into place for writing.

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- **Make it a game!** That means taking turns, which means that your child can get to be the leader in follow-my-leader, or the circus trainer, and that you get to do the exercises. My kids are very motivated to do even the ones they find demanding, if they know that they will get a turn to be in charge. So, ham it up and make them laugh!

## Leopard crawl

**You need:** a stretch of floor or grass

**How to do it:**

This is a great obstacle course or follow-my-leader activity (especially if an adult is involved!) Ask your child to lie on his tummy and then to move forward using his elbows to pull himself along. Doing it under tables and chairs is a great incentive, and as an outdoor activity, it lends itself well to a jungle or army theme party!



## The big push

**You need:** yourself and/or a wall

**How to do it:**

Tell your child the wall is falling down, and ask him to push it to keep it up. Make sure he has only his hands on the wall (no shoulders), and try and keep elbows slightly bent. **Look at the gallery** below to see good and poor positioning.

Alternatively, ask your child to try and push you backwards. Put your hands together as shown in the fourth picture in the gallery below, both of you keeping elbows slightly bent (not locking the elbow joints ensures that the shoulder girdle muscles do as much work as possible!) Stand with one foot behind the other and on the count of 3, PUSH each other as hard as possible until one of you moves backwards.

To make this a really fun competition, draw a line behind each of you – if you get pushed over the line you lose. Do "best of 5", and give your child stiff competition, even winning one or 2, so he feels like he has worked hard for his victory – don't be a pushover!

## Crab walk

**You need:** no crabs!! Just your child and a stretch of floor or grass and a bean bag or small soft toy

**How to do it:**

Ask your child to get into this position (a demonstration by an adult is usually best, so get on the floor!). Ask the child to walk backwards, like a crab, to a destination and back again. If she is struggling to keep her bottom off the floor, put a beanbag or soft toy on her tummy – she will have to keep her bottom up to stop the toy from falling off. This is a great outdoor activity to do as part of an obstacle course or follow-my-leader.

As this activity is quite demanding, set a short distance (2-3metres) for your child's first attempt, and include it as a small part of an obstacle course or follow-my-leader game. As your child's endurance increases, you can increase the distance set.

## Ball Walk

**You need:** a therapy ball and a couple of metres of smooth wall (we used a wall in our entrance hall). [PFOT sell Therapy Balls of all sizes.](#) **How to do it:**

Look at the gallery below to see this activity in photos. Ask your child to crouch facing

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the wall, and put his hands on the ball. Using both hands together, but moving them in a walking motion (reciprocally), he must "walk" the ball up the wall until the centre of the ball is just above shoulder level.

Then he should "walk" the ball along the length of wall, keeping it at the same height. Doing this a few times is a great shoulder exercise for kids of all ages. Aim for **slow controlled movements** – the child who wants to do it quickly can sometimes be compensating for the lack of stability needed to do it slowly in a controlled way!

## Shoulder Exercises for kids to do at a desk before a fine motor task.

### Chair push-ups

**You need:** a child- sized chair without arms (and an adult sized one with which you can demonstrate)

**How to do it:**

Put your hands on either side of your chair, and PUSH, until your bottom rises off the chair. Hold for 5 counts. Ask your child to copy you! If this is too easy, ask your child to lift his feet off the floor and hold them off while raising his bottom, and hold for 5 counts. A great exercise to do before writing.



### Hand Pushes

**You need:** Just your hands

**How to do it:**

A great shoulder exercise for kids to practice before commencing a handwriting task. Ask your child to copy you as you demonstrate: place your palms together, with elbows out and forearms held horizontally as in the photo. Now push your hands together as hard as you can and hold for 5 seconds – you should feel all the muscles around your shoulder girdle contract. Repeat a few times.

Encourage your fidgety child to do this exercise if she loses focus in a writing lesson.



OT Mom Learning Activities



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