



Fine Motor Skills: 'Fabulous Flexi-Fingers'

Fine motor skills control the movement of the hands and fingers. Gross motor control needs to be developed before the fine control will be successful. Children need to develop strength in their fingers and learn to manipulate objects that they hold, including tools such as cutters, rollers, brushes, scissors and pencils. Good fine motor control is vital if children are to develop confidently in their writing skills.

Remember you need to support children in developing their skills over time. Through observations, offer children a range of appropriate resources and opportunities to challenge and develop, ensuring a progression of skills. Adults also need to support children's resilience and perseverance when tackling new challenges.

Here are some top tips:

- **Treasure Baskets:** Provide objects that are safe for babies to pick up and bring to their mouths, offering things that are different textures, sizes, weights, and colours. Ensure adults supervise safety and allow time for exploration.
- **Heuristic Play:** Allowing children to explore the sensory properties of different natural objects and materials allows them to develop their fine motor skills whilst also promoting their curiosity and language development.
- **Squeezy / Fidget Toys:** Encourage repetitive movements for grasping and manipulating objects e.g. 'Push Push Pop' the Poppits.
- **Ziplock Bags:** Put paint or oil and glitter into bags and seal with tape then demonstrate how to use fingers to make patterns, shapes and lines or form letters and numbers.
- **Sensory Books:** Provide squeezy toys and books with 'touchy feely' sections and flaps.
- **Hands On:** Offer trays of gloop (cornflour and water), slime (soap flakes and water), custard powder, shaving foam, ground biscuits for edible sand, dry rice, pasta shapes, lentils, beans etc. Remember to always be aware of potential allergies!
- **Buried Treasure:** Use wet / dry sand or trays of lentils / rice / pasta for children to dig with their fingers to find the hidden objects. As they become more skilled make the objects smaller or challenge children to pick them up with tweezers / tongs.
- **Squeezing Sponges:** Soak sponges in water and have children squeeze them out to work on hand strength or wring out wet cloths. Incorporate with imaginative play such as a 'car wash' or give children the responsibility of 'cleaning' windows, easels, bikes and scooters.
- **Clothes Pegs:** Clip and unclip items such as dolls clothes, number cards, matching socks and picture cards to build finger coordination. For additional fun and games, set a timer and challenge the children to clip as many pegs as they can onto themselves!
- **Peg Boards:** Great for children to create their own shapes, patterns and pictures whilst exercising their fine motor muscles.
- **Tearing Paper:** Tear strips of tissue paper or old newspapers. Screw pieces into a ball and throw into a hoop or a bucket. Who can score the most?
- **Table Football:** Why not flick a ball of paper between goalposts made from Lego or blocks? Create your own mini 'World Cup Tournament'.
- **Puppets:** Have finger and hand puppets accessible in your story corner. Utilise these during singing time and let children demonstrate actions to their friends e.g. 5 Little Ducks.
- **Bubble Wrap:** Encourage popping big and small bubbles with both hands and feet.
- **Tweezers or Tongs:** Sort small and intricate objects such as beads, jewels, pasta and buttons into containers e.g. chocolate-box inserts for pincer grip practice. Remember to always risk assess for choking hazards.



- **Pinching Pom Poms:** Use thumb and forefinger to pick up and sort pom poms into different containers. How about fishing them out of water then squeezing them dry!
- **Baking:** Stir, mix and whisk ingredients and decorate biscuits or cakes with sprinkles, silver balls, Smarties, raisins or jelly tots.
- **Playdough:** 'Dough Disco' activities including squeezing, rolling and shaping playdough using fingers for endless open-ended creativity. Introduce a variety of modelling tools for additional challenge and push in small objects such as beads, jewels or matchsticks. As hand and finger muscles strengthen offer clay or plasticine as these offer more resistance.
- **Spray Bottle:** Water plants, wash windows or spray targets such as chalk numbers, letters, key words etc.
- **Ketchup Bottles:** Allow the children to take off the lids, fill with paint and / or water, replace the lids and get squeezing!
- **Hole Punching:** Offer hole punches in your 'Creative Station' and ensure there is a range of string and wool for children to thread, join, create and explore!
- **Stapling:** Staple pieces of paper together or make a fun design with the staples.
- **Cutting:** Use stage appropriate scissors to practice cutting skills against a variety of resistance including thicker construction paper, card, playdough, straws etc.
- **Glue Bottles:** Using squeeze glue bottles for hand strengthening.
- **Turkey Baster:** Squeeze the squishy end of a turkey baster to blow pompoms or paper balls across the tables or add them to your water trays for bubbles and fun!
- **Bath Toys:** Use squishy, squeeze toys in your water play for hand strengthening.
- **Fine Motor Games:** Play games such as Tiddlywinks, Solitaire, Marble Run and Dominoes.
- **Colouring:** Have colouring pictures available in the provision for children to access in order to strengthen their finger muscles. This also helps to decrease future fatigue for writing.
- **Mark Making:** Offer a varied and wide range of mark making implements such as finger paints, chunky chinks, crayons, pencils, pens, brushes, glue spreaders, corks, rollers, cotton buds, string, pipettes, feathers etc. Children need access to a broad variety of paper (variable sizes, shapes, colours, textures, thickness), post-its, outdoor clipboards, whiteboards, chalkboards, cards, invitations, notepads, diaries which should be available in all areas of the provision ... don't forget outside!
- **Blocks and Stacking Toys:** Ensure children have access to a wide range of developmentally appropriate construction materials including everything from wooden blocks and stacking cups to Duplo, Lego, Sticklebricks and Mobilo.
- **Loose Parts Play:** Allow children to access nuts and bolts, hammers and nails, keys and locks, golf tees into polystyrene, balls and kitchen roll tubes, conkers, pipes, pebbles, bottle tops, jewels, dried flowers, dried fruit pieces, flower petals, ice, curtain rings, mug trees, bangles, log slices, shells ... the opportunities are endless!
- **Sewing:** Provide children with hessian, child-friendly needles and wool or thread. Initially children will need this modelling but over time you will see their independence and confidence with this skill soar. Take a look at Sewing With Young Children – A Froebelian approach
- **Dressing and Undressing:** Model and then encourage children to attempt their own buttons, zips, press studs and other fastenings when dressing and undressing. Make it fun such as having 'The Zip Challenge'. Offer specific resources such as dressing teddies and dolls.
- **Home Corner:** Allow children to access a permanent 'Home Corner' with resources mirroring home life to practice everyday skills such as using cutlery, crockery, pots and pans, egg timers, tongs, remote controls, telephones etc. Consider adding enhancements and malleable materials for children to further practice their skills, such as pouring and scooping.
- **Snack and Mealtimes:** Promote autonomy by encouraging chopping, cutting, peeling and enable children to serve snacks and pour their own drinks. Also encourage the use of knives, forks and spoons supporting children through hand-over-hand if needed.
- **Packed Lunch:** Inspire independent skills by modelling and then encouraging children to unpack their own packed lunches. Support them with opening wrappers, peeling fruit, pouring drinks, piercing cartons with straws. Praise and celebrate success no matter how small.