

HAVERHILL PUBLIC SCHOOLS

OT DEPARTMENT

FINE MOTOR SKILLS: GRADES K-8

Pincer Grasp

A pincer grasp is seen when the thumb and first two fingers meet. As grasp matures, we develop an “open webspace”. Do you see how the thumb and index finger make a circle when they touch? This enables kids to easily straighten and bend fingers.

Pincer grasp can be improved through any activities that encourage a child to hold small objects between the thumb and fingers. Suggestions include tearing paper, playing with LEGOs and K'Nex, stringing Cheerios, and writing with short crayon pieces to promote an “open webspace”.

Try having your child pinch open clothespins or squeeze clips. Placing the clothespins on adult's clothing and pretending they are “bugs” can be a fun game. Make sure the child is using the tips of the index finger and thumb.

Hand Strength

Did you know that the “pinky” side of the hand and the “thumb” side of the hand play different roles? The “pinky” side provides strength. (Can you feel that large muscle on the outside of the hand?) The “thumb” side specializes in dexterity. Developing hand strength in the “pinky” side is crucial for many academic and daily life tasks.

Hand strength in children can improve through daily participation in a variety of fine motor activities. These include opening and closing containers and Ziploc bags, pulling on and off socks and shoes, cutting with scissors, squeezing sponges or wringing washcloths during water play (or when helping with the dishes)! Also try having the child squirt a water bottle to help with watering plants or cleaning surfaces.

For scissor skills, some students may need to start with snipping items such as straws, paper plates, or thick construction paper. Generally, thicker items are easier to snip than paper, which requires greater fine motor control. If this is easy for your child, move on to cutting straight lines then shapes and curves. Thicker lines increase the chance of success when cutting.

Bilateral Coordination

Using two hands together is key for success in a child's many daily tasks such as learning to tie shoes, buttoning and zipping, and opening and closing food containers. Class activities, such as placing worksheets in a folder, holding a piece of paper with one hand while writing, or using a pencil and ruler to draw lines, all use both hands.

Encouraging children to engage in two-handed tasks helps to improve this area of fine motor skills. Try something fun, like mixing a bowl of pancake batter, threading beads or pasta to make a keychain or necklace, or building a sandcastle with Kinetic Sand or Play-Doh! Using a rolling pin is a great two-handed activity. Cutting with scissors progressing from just snipping or cutting on a straight line to more challenging cutting: basic shapes (circles, squares) and progressing to irregular shapes (star, pictures).

Tactile Perception

Children develop hand skills by interacting with objects in their environments. Picking up a pompom is very different from picking up a large rock. A child uses a light touch and barely any shoulder movement for the pompom. Whereas, she uses a strong grasp and plenty of shoulder strength to lift a rock.

We can provide children with a variety of daily tactile and proprioceptive experiences to help them master the force needed to hold an object and to adjust and accommodate to different sensory experiences. Many fine motor and craft activities offer tactile experiences with glue, finger paint, sand, or chalk.

- Mix water and cornstarch to make a solid-liquid material that is irresistible to touch.
- Hide items in a lunch bag and see if your child can guess what is inside with using just their hands.
- You can make a salt tray to draw shapes and pictures-just pour into a baking sheet or pan.

Shoulder Stability/Reaching

In order to have good fine motor control, the shoulder must be stable and a child must have adequate upper body strength. Think about it: If a child has trouble sitting up straight or if he cannot hold his shoulder and arm still, then he cannot cut carefully on a line or accurately place pegs in a pegboard. Activities to build shoulder strength are key to developing fine motor skills.

Try things like animal walks (bear crawls, donkey kicks!), crawling through tunnels, wheelbarrow walks, monkey bars (if you have them in your yard), balloon volley to keep the balloon overhead, washing tables or wiping windows,

- Drawing/writing/coloring on a vertical surface
- Pile up the couch cushions to make a mountain to climb
- Throw a bedsheet over the kitchen table to make a homemade tunnel or hideout.
- Take a ball for a walk. Try using a ball and roll it on the wall as far as you can without dropping it. Start at shoulder height and advance to trying it over your head. If you don't have a lot of wall space trying walking the ball up and down the wall. Count the number of times you can do it and challenge others at home.

