

WHAT ARE FINE MOTOR SKILLS AND WHY ARE THEY IMPORTANT?

Did you know that there are 34 muscles responsible for moving the fingers? Most of them are tiny little things (thus, the term “fine” motor). And they all need to be strengthened just like every other muscle in the body if they're going to do their best work.

Not only do they need to be strong, but they also need to coordinate together in order to accomplish even basic daily tasks. This can be a huge challenge for many kiddos, especially in this age of technology where they are just not interacting with the world around them in the same way.

The activities in this collection are designed to give your child exposure to finger and hand movements that will prepare them for the more complex tasks that will be required of them as they move on to kindergarten, like holding a pencil, using scissors, managing their own backpacks and jackets and so much more.

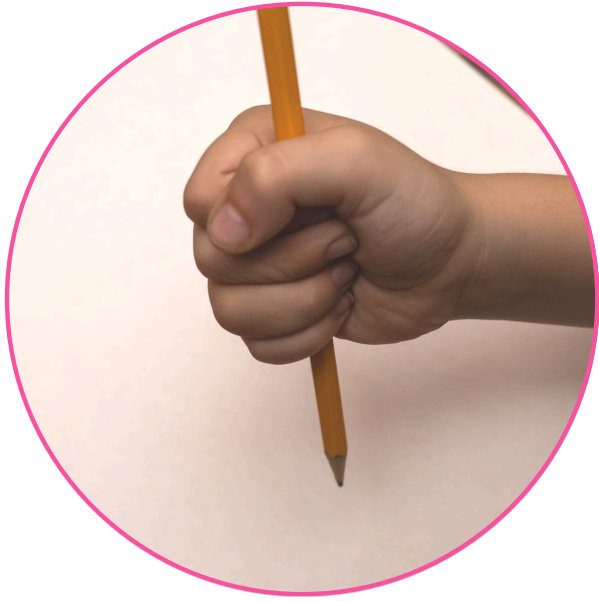
Here are some of the main skills we will address while playing with these seasonal printables:

- Mature grasp
- Finger isolation
- Hand strengthening
- Finger dexterity
- Separation of the sides of the hand
- Arch development
- Hand-eye coordination
- Bilateral Coordination

Of course, they will also be learning and having fun as they go through each easy to prep activity.

GRASP PATTERN DEVELOPMENT

Palmar Grasp
1 to 1 1/2 yrs.



Digital Grasp
2 to 3 yrs.



Modified Tripod Grasp
3 1/2 to 4 yrs.



Mature Tripod Grasp
4 1/2 to 7 yrs.



SOME OF MY FAVORITE OT TIPS

While going through these fun hands-activities, here are a few tips and tricks that you may want to implement:

- **Break those crayons:** It's easier for kids to use a mature pinch grasp when it's really the only option that we give them. If you leave a crayon its normal length, a child can still wrap their entire fist around it...the grasp pattern we are trying to move on from. But if you break the crayon so that it is significantly smaller, there's just not enough crayon left for them to wrap their hand around. I know...we all like shiny new things, but, trust me, break those crayons...even the new ones. When using markers or pencils, shorter and stubbier are best.
- **Don't be too generous with the supplies:** Say we're working with some small pompoms for a mat activity...instead of putting a bunch on the table in a pile all at once, put a few out at a time, spaced out from each other. With this approach, your child is more likely to use a tip pinch to pick them up and place them one at a time rather than grasping at them with the full hand.
- **Give lots of movement breaks:** Preschoolers are not wired to sit for long periods of time. That's not to say that there won't sometimes be things that really hold their attention. But a good rule of thumb is that you should expect your child to have an attention span that is about 4 minutes x years old. If your child is not yet up to that expectation...that's ok. Meet them where they are and build up to longer activities. I use a timer for this, with it set alternately for "work time" and "break time". The "work time" gradually gets longer as the "break time" gets shorter. Note: don't use screens during "break time". It's just too hard to transition back to the activity. [Here's an article on increasing attention span that you might find helpful also.](#)

- **Warm up the sensory system first:** Even for kiddos who do not have specific struggles with sensory issues, warming up the sensory system is a great way to promote focus. And for those who are typically high or low in terms of their sensory regulation, it's absolutely essential to address this before moving on to any sort of "work". Some simple and fun sensory warm ups include big stretches, self-hugs, wall or chair push-ups, or hand and scalp massage. Some kids may need even more, like swinging or time on a mini trampoline. If your child is a sensory seeker, this may be the case. However, if you have your child engage in a high energy warm-up, follow it up with a cool down, like deep breaths or stretches, before expecting them to be able to sit and focus.
- **Consider alternate positions:** There is no rule that says learning has to happen while seated at a table or desk. As a matter of fact, for preschoolers this may actually be counter-productive. They learn best when engaging all of the senses, which rarely happens when sitting still. So, change it up. Maybe do one activity at the table, but then have your child lay on his/her tummy on the floor for the next one. Tape coloring pages to the wall or under a table (or on a tree for that matter). Sit cross-legged on the floor for a lacing task. Go outside. Place these activities throughout an obstacle course to be completed (inside or outside). As always, focus on play.

SET UP TO PRACTICE CROSSING MIDLINE

What is crossing midline? Crossing midline is when one side of the body crosses the invisible middle line into the other side of the body, a natural movement that typically develops as kids move toward developing hand dominance. It's a sign that the brain is organizing itself. But there are some instances where a kiddo just needs a little bit of encouragement for this skill to develop successfully, and it's an essential building block to so many other skills.

Why is it even important? When a child is not spontaneously crossing midline consistently, you may also notice difficulties with many basic daily tasks like reading, writing and other motor tasks.

How do I know if my child is having difficulty with crossing midline? You may notice that your child is using hands equally as often for fine motor skills. They will also likely switch hands when crossing midline instead of using one fluid movement.

An easy way to practice crossing midline. My favorite and simplest way to have kids practice crossing midline is through set up during every day activities. First, notice which hand your child is preferring for a task (eg-eating a finger food snack or playing with legos). Then place the item opposite that hand on the far side of the activity being completed. Encourage your child to reach across the body to obtain the objects. You may even need to gently hold the hand you do not want them to use. Activities in this pack that are great for using this strategy are the snack mats, BINGO chips, coins, beads, etc.

BUILDING BLOCKS TO SUCCESS

The hand does not function in isolation. It's supported by the wrist, arm, shoulder, and core muscles. And it's instructed by the brain on what to do and how to move. Plus, it often coordinates with the eyes.

So, even though our focus during these activities is to incorporate opportunities to improve fine motor skills into the learning process, don't forget to be encouraging good posture. Pay attention to things like shoulders slumping and awkward sitting positions. And also be aware of signs of eye fatigue, like rubbing of the eyes, squinting or overly watery eyes. This is your child's body giving you information for what it needs.

Strengthening these supportive structures isn't something that we are going to really get into here, but it is something that you should be aware of.

And don't forget to "Put first things first". Before a child is able to learn anything, they first have to have their basic needs met so that they can focus on the task at hand. Create a comfortable and pleasant learning environment. Be sure your kiddo isn't looking for a snack at the moment you want to start learning. Consider any sensory needs or sensitivities your child may be experience. Create an optimal learning environment.

Most of all...KEEP IT FUN!!!