Tips to help parents
Encourage children to develop their fine motor skills at home

What are fine motor skills?

Fine motor skills require the use of the small muscles in your child’s hands and arms to manipulate objects. Examples of such tasks are pencil grasp, pencil control, cutting with scissors, manipulating small objects, printing and writing. Developing fine motor skills is an important part in every child’s early educational experience.

Some children in Kindergarten and the early grades have difficulty developing fine motor skills. As parents, you play an important role in identifying your child as having these difficulties. You can give them support by adding fine motor activities into your daily routine.

Note: Computer use, videogames, cell phones, tablets and other hand held devices do not promote the development of fine motor skills.

Among the Canadian Pediatric Society recommendations:

- Families should reduce the number of hours a day spent on sedentary activities and keep television sets, video games, cell phones and computers out of children’s bedrooms.
Here are some tips that can be effective.

1. **Children need to be properly seated to promote good fine motor function.**
   - Feet flat on the floor or accommodated on a footrest
   - Hips and knees at a 90 degree angle
   - Table height just above elbow height in sitting (try to avoid shoulder shrugging)
   - Ensure that both arms are supported

2. **Some children benefit from alternate work positions**
   - The work surface should be sloped. Activities such as pegboards, puzzles, magnet shapes, sticker pictures and felt boards can all be oriented on a vertical or angled surface by using a slanted desk top or a table easel or even a 3-ring binder (with rings farthest from the child).

3. **It is helpful for children to warm up their small hand muscles before starting printing or fine motor tasks.**
   Have your child do some of these hand warm-ups before printing or starting other fine motor tasks:
   - alternately clenching the fists and opening the hands
   - spreading and closing fingers
   - wiggling fingers or drumming them individually on a table top
   - bending and straightening fingers one at a time
   - clapping and rubbing hands together
   - playing finger games (e.g. Itsy Bitsy Spider)
4. Children benefit from doing activities to strengthen and develop hand muscles.

- modeling with play dough, clay and plasticine
- building with interlocking blocks such as Lego, K’nex and math cubes
- beading and lacing
- cutting straws, licorice, cardboard or bristol board
- cutting and pasting, paper tearing, crumpling paper balls
- using stamps
- using rubber or foam puzzles
- website www.prekinders.com
- www.prekinders.com/fine-motor-skills/

5. Children need practice with colouring and paper/pencil skills at home as well as at school

- try using large markers, crayons and pencils, which are easier to grasp. Some children work best with small pencils (small tools for small hands) such as golfing pencils and other children prefer large pencils such as primary pencils.
- break crayons or chalk into short pieces and try colouring and drawing on vertical surface

See picture below for a proper pencil grasp.

6. Learning to print

- Teach upper-case letters before lower case
- Group letters according to how they are formed. For example, capital letters C, G, O, Q, and S all begin with a curved stroke to the left
- Teach top-to-bottom and left-to-right strokes (left-hand dominant students may print top-down, right-to-left. There are alternate printing sheets for left-handed students – e.g. “Big Strokes For Little Folks”).
A song (from Handwriting Without Tears) that can help with directionality: sing to the tune of “If you’re happy and you know it” – “Where do you start your letters, at the top; Where do you start your letters, at the top; If you want to start a letter, then you better better better, Remember to start it at the top” – children tend to remember this song and it can make a difference once they learn it. Encourage parents to sing it with their children.

- Reinforce the directions by providing cues for starting and stopping points such as red and green dots (verbal cue: “green says go, red says stop)
- Try writing on two or three lines rather than one (try different types of paper: e.g. start with wide-ruled, interlined paper with visual cues in margins. Some children have difficulty with baseline orientation and work well on raised-line paper. Some children work better on narrow-ruled, interlined paper. Try a variety of paper, as every child is different. Rule of thumb is usually to start with wide-ruled paper. Interlined paper helps with letter size and placement).
- Try a variety of drawing activities such as mazes, dot-to-dot, and activity books.

Additional websites:

- www.getreadyschool.com
- www.dltk-kids.com
- www.first-school.ws
- www.dotolearn.com
- www.toolsforkids.ca
- www.therapystreetforkids.com
- www.hwtears.com

Make it fun! Positive reinforcement with your child will help promote fine motor development!