

Pencil Grasp Activities

Introduction

The manner in which a child holds a pencil is called "pencil grasp." It involves the positioning of their fingers on the pencil & the position of the pencil in their hand. Usually between the ages of 4 & 5, most child have developed a mature & efficient pencil grasp.

An efficient pencil grasp is one that allows the greatest amount of finger movement and is the least fatiguing for the muscles of the hands. These qualities are very important when learning to print & handwrite.

The most commonly seen efficient pencil grasp is called a "Tripod" pencil grasp. It is characterized by holding the pencil with the thumb, index, and middle fingers, and is used by most adults.

Many skills are required to develop an efficient pencil grasp. These include the ability to move fingers in isolation of each other, adequate hand muscle strength, & good wrist stability.

Delicate Touch (the ability to use different amounts of pressure)

- Paint with an eye-dropper
- Pick up fragile objects (Cornflakes, mini-marshmallows, small pieces of foam) with tweezers, tongs or fingers, without breaking or denting them
- Drawing or tracing on tissue paper
- Line up Dominos on their end or sides
- Release and count drops of water from an eye dropper one at a time

Precision Rotation (the ability to spin objects with your fingers)

- Activities that require rotating an object in one's finger tips
- Spinning tops and playing Jacks

- Hold a flat object such as a book or plate on extended fingers, and ask the child to rotate the object on their fingertips.
- Threading nuts on/off of bolts (progress from large to small)
- Hold two balls in one hand and attempt to rotate one ball around the other.

Separation of the Sides of the Hands (the ability to hold something in your hand while using your fingers)

- Activities that require one side of the hand for stability & the other side for movement
- Squeeze the trigger on a spray bottle with the pointer & index finger, while the thumb and other fingers stabilize the bottle.
- Roll small balls of Playdoh between the thumb and index finger
- Give the child a number of small items such as coins, beads, or bingo chips to hold in one hand. Then ask them to sort and place the items into a container one at a time using only their thumb and index finger.

The Arches of the Hands (general hand development)

- Roll objects such as a small ball or silly putty within the palm
- Roll a pair of dice within cupped hands
- Activities that require weight bearing through open hands such as wheel barrel walking and imitating animals by crawling on all four
- Line up a row of several pennies and turn them over as quickly as possible using finger movements
- Open & close zip-lock bags using fingertips, ensuring that web spaces do not collapse

- Ask the child to cup their hands with their palms up, and gradually add grains of rice (or coffee, sand, water, etc.) to the maximum amount the child can hold.

Small Muscles of the Hand (muscle strength)

- Play tug-of-war with small diameter objects such as elastic bands, coffee stir sticks, or plastic lacing.
- String beads ensuring that the child using finger movements to place the string through the bead rather placing the bead over the string.
- Insert pegs into a peg-board
- Wring out clothes or sponges
- Playing with clay, putty or Playdoh
- Games & toys that involve grasping or squeezing things

Wrist Stability (wrist strength)

- Drawing/writing on a chalk board or another surface that is above eye level
- Use a rolling pin to flatten Playdoh, cracker crumbs, cookie dough, etc. and make sure that the hands are open rather than closed around the handles
- Position games and toys on a vertical surface
- Paint, draw, colour, etc. on a vertical surface or mounted on a clipboard.

Please refer to the Articles & Information section of our website for information on developing a mature pencil grasp.

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