

## DEVELOPING FINE MOTOR SKILLS IN THE EARLY CHILDHOOD YEARS

Children need to develop strong muscles in their hands and fingers, plus learn how to coordinate those muscles, to learn to write or even tie their shoes. Parents can provide opportunities for their children to develop these **fine motor skills** from a young age by giving them chances to...



**SQUEEZE.** Fill a basin with water and add some small sponges. Show kids how to squeeze the liquid out of the sponge. Children as young as one year old may enjoy this. This activity could be easily incorporated into bath time. Other squeezable items include play dough (make sure it is non-toxic, just in case) and small bean bags.



**CUT.** Give your toddler or preschooler scissors designed for kids to practice cutting scraps of paper or old magazines. Older children may enjoy cutting pieces of string or yarn, or thicker items, such as cardboard.

**PINCH.** Provide them with a liquid eye-dropper or turkey baster to use in the tub or in a basin of water. They will probably enjoy filling the dropper/baster, and squirting out the water. Challenge older kids to move small objects - such as beads or cotton balls - with tweezers or chopsticks. Make a game out of it!

**STRING & LACE.** There are commercial lacing cards available; however, it is simple to make your own. Glue a picture from a children's magazine, such as a beloved TV character or other interesting object, onto a thin piece of cardboard. Let dry. Punch holes through the picture & cardboard. Give your child a piece of yarn to use to weave in and out of the holes.



Lacing card



**DRAW, WRITE, & CREATE.** When children under two years old first "draw" they use more gross motor (large muscle) skills. Most move the crayon back and forth using their arm or shoulder muscles. At this stage, they usually create vertical and horizontal lines. As they get older and develop fine motor skills, they use the small muscles in their hands and fingers to control the marks they make. Give children as young as one year old paper, fat crayons, or a paint brush dipped in non-toxic, washable paint to try. Toddlers and preschoolers will benefit from, and probably enjoy, experimenting with writing tools, too.

### TIPS FOR PARENTS AND OTHER GROWN-UPS:

- SAFETY FIRST!** Activities should be supervised by an adult, especially ones involving water, as children can drown in a shallow tub or basin. Also, small children have been known to eat things they should not eat, cut their hair, paint the walls, etc. when not watched.
- Adding baby shampoo (or liquid soap that won't burn young eyes) to paint will make it easier to wash out of clothes. Also, there are markers that only work on special paper, not on walls or carpets! Check out your local art supply store or recycling center for supplies.
- Children's interests & skills develop and/or change over time. If your children do not seem interested in the above activities, or have difficulty with them the first time you introduce them, try again in a few weeks or months. Don't give up, and most of all, have fun!

Parts of this tip sheet were inspired by "Helping Your Children to Write" , and article posted on the Chateaq MeddyBemps TM Web site at [www.meddybemps.com](http://www.meddybemps.com) and "Little Artists" by Paula Spencer, which ran in the April, 2003 edition of *Parenting Magazine*.

