



Play Skills and Activities

Parent Pack

Play Skills

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Fine Motor Skills 1



Children develop their hand and finger strength through a variety of fine motor activities. This helps to develop hand-eye coordination and manipulation skills. These are important pre-writing skills and also encourage your child to explore and be creative.

Shaving Foam Fun

Spray some shaving foam/gel onto a smooth surface or tray. Encourage your child to touch the foam. Rub it between your/their fingers or spread it out over the tray and trace designs. It is also fun to rub it onto cheeks and nose and look in the mirror. You may also wish to feel and explore cooked spaghetti, jelly, a corn flour /water mix, etc.



Lucky Dip

Fill a shoe box with dry sand. Hide some small toys in the sand, such as cars, bricks, animals etc. Dip your hand into the sand and feel for and find a toy, then name it. Ask your child to have a go. You can swap the sand for dried pasta, rice etc.

Colouring Fun

Give your child a lot of experience scribbling and drawing. Explore different methods such as crayons, colouring pencils, finger paints and brushes. Even painting with water onto old newspaper can be fun.

Dough

Play dough is easily available in many shops however it can sometimes be too stiff if your child has a weak grip. You can make a soft dough by mixing flour and water and encourage your child to press, squeeze, roll and pinch the dough. Use an old pencil to make patterns. Find other pattern pressers such as a duplo brick or egg cup.



Fine Motor Skills 2



Your child's hand control will develop, though play. At first they grab with the whole hand (palmer grasp) and with time and practice this refines to a pincer grip. There are many fun activities to develop this skill.



Sorting

You will need three bowls and a collection of 2 sets of objects (e.g. marbles and Lego bricks *or* grapes and strawberries, about 6 of each). Mix the objects in one bowl and then encourage your child to sort them out into separate bowls. As your child becomes confident choose smaller objects such as pennies and buttons *or* raisins and cheerios. You may want to progress to one object for the right hand and one for the left.

Threading

Your child can practice threading beads onto a lace. You can easily make your own lace by carefully sticking a cocktail stick to a piece of string. Then thread it through dry penne pasta to make a necklace. Why not paint it afterwards.



Pegging



Practice pegging clothes pegs around a box. At first your child may only be able to pull off the pegs. With time and practice they will get better at putting them on. You may wish to progress to pegging onto a line.

Gross Motor Skills



Gross motor skills develop the large muscles of the body that enable walking, kicking, sitting upright, lifting, and throwing a ball. A child's gross motor skills depend on both muscle tone and strength. You can help to develop core strength in your child by playing in a variety of different places and body positions.

Sitting on the floor and reaching, pointing and stretching will develop core stability and balance. This is a great place to sing and practice action rhymes. Or try rolling a ball back and forth. This will encourage your child to lean out and reach and then come back to an upright position.



Lying on your tummy is a great place to do puzzles, look at books, and play with small word figures, like the farm. This is good for building upper arm and shoulder strength.

Out side play is a great opportunity to experience different surfaces. Stepping from smooth, firm paving on to soft, uneven grass can be a challenge for a young child who is learning to move independently. Allow your child to build up movement skills by exploring lots of different environments.



Obstacle Course

Why not build an obstacle course with small books for your child to step over and soft cushions for your child to step on. You may wish to draw chalk lines on the pavement for your child to follow, and pretend they are walking a tight rope.

Animal Movements

Get onto the ground and pretend to slither like a snake, creep like a cat, hop like a frog, roar like a lion etc. When your child becomes familiar with the movements take it in turns to call out and move like an animal.

Interactive Play Skills



Play is an important part of children's learning and development. Children learn all kinds of skills through play; how things work, how to interact and share with other children, how to play with different toys and enter a world of imagination. Play enables children to test things out safely, to learn about emotions and to talk with others.

Puzzles

Do a simple jigsaw puzzle with your child. If you don't have any puzzles, you can make your own by cutting up a picture from a magazine into 4 to 6 pieces – can your child put them back together to make the picture?



Treasure box

- You and your child could make up a treasure box along a theme.
- You could get some pots and pans, pretend food and some soft toys and get ready for a picnic.
- Or get some old jewellery, an eye patch and a treasure map and get ready for a pirate adventure!

Make your own car

Turn a cardboard box into a car - draw on wheels or stick on paper plates, use silver foil for headlights, put a cushion inside to make the seat - now where will your child go on their adventure, who will they take with them?

Shopping

Keep old packaging such as egg boxes, cereal packets, juice bottles, tissue boxes etc- your child can make their own shop and sell things to other people. Try toy shops, clothes shops – talk about what they need and where to get it from.



Social Interaction Skills



We communicate and interact with each other in different ways. Learning the skills of social interaction is an important part of play. Children need to learn when to talk and when to listen, how to take turns, how to share and how to wait.

Get down to their level

Conversations with a child are easier if you are on the same level. It might mean sitting or lying on the floor to talk and play.

Talk about what is happening

Watch a TV programme together and talk about it afterwards. When they are playing, comment on what they are doing. Wait for children to talk first then expand on what they have to say.

Taking turns

Play any simple game where you need to take turns.

- Take turns to add a brick to a tower you're building...
- take turns to play a simple game like snap...
- take turns to throw a ball...



Story time

- Share a story either from a book or make up a story or tell stories about when you were young.
- Your child could make up their own stories about their toys, which you could join in with.
- Or get your child to tell their own stories using pictures– what do they think might happen next...?

Sharing

Gather up a collection of similar toys such as toy cars or teddies.

Share them out, “one for you, one for me.....”

Play with your toys beside your child and after a time you can agree to swap a toy.



Waiting

Have a sand timer, egg timer or stop watch in sight.

Bring a favourite toy or game to the play area and start the timer asking the child to “wait” for the timer to beep/finish before playing with the toy.

Begin with a short wait (10 seconds) and work up to a longer time.

Listening Skills



Listening is an essential skill for talking and learning. Sometimes children need a bit of quiet time to help them to tune into talking and listening, rather than the noises going on around them.

Listening treasure box

Collect lots of things that make a noise, such as:

Crinkly paper

Noise making toys

Pots and pans

Musical instruments

Books with noise buttons

Explore! Listen and talk about them.



Where is that noise?

Get a toy or play music on a CD player or phone or mp3 player.

Hide the noisy object somewhere in the room – can your child find it?

Go games - wait for go

Build a tower of bricks. Your child waits for you to say “Go” before they can knock it down.

- Have a race – ready steady go...
- Push a car to each other – ready steady go...
- Dance around – ready steady go...
- Roll the ball – ready steady go...

Spot the mistake

Sing a simple rhyme or song, but make a mistake – can children spot the mistake?

- Incy wincy spider climbing up... a tree (should be spout)
- The wheels on the... train go round and round (should be bus)
- Twinkle twinkle little... hat (should be star)



Understanding



Understanding is key to talking and listening. Children need to understand what single words mean and when they are joined together into sentences. Adults play an important role in answering the many questions children ask and in checking out whether or not children understand.

Shopping games

Set up a pretend shop.

Have 4 or 5 things in your shop – they can be toys or real things from your cupboards. Ask your child to go and buy...

- The bread.
- The beans and the milk.
- The apple, the cheese and the yoghurt.

Begin by asking for one item, when your child can do this easily ask for two, then three etc.

Posty

Make a postbox out of an old cardboard box, with a hole cut in it.

Your child can be a Posty – have 4 or 5 toys to choose from.

Ask them to collect different 'parcels' for posting.

- "Can you post the spot book?"
- "Can you post the jigsaw?"



Instruction time

Children need to wait for you to say "go". When you do they can run around, but must stop when you say "stop" and clap your hands. Play in different ways by having children listen to an instruction, such as "Hop around and stop when I clap" or "Jump on the spot and stop when I bang on the drum".

Puppets

Do what I say - use any puppet or even an old sock. The puppets give simple instructions for the child to follow:

- "Go and touch the chair"
- "Jump up and down"
- "Find something you can eat"
- "Touch your head and rub your tummy"

Problem Solving Skills



When a young child is completing a visual game, such as a shape sorter or puzzle board, they have to practice lots of skills. They have to look at lots of shapes and spaces and they have to figure out what goes where? We can help by presenting the problem in simple steps;

1. Work in a space where there are no other distractions, such as TV.
2. Allow your child to explore the toy for a short time.
3. Model the activity by slowly inserting each piece, taking time to describe the pieces.
4. Allow your child to complete the last piece. Give them time to turn the piece themselves before giving hand over hand help.
5. Next time allow your child to complete the last 2 pieces.
6. Repeat over time until they can complete the whole activity.



- When following patterns in threading, stacking or pegging games you can help by setting out only the pieces needed.
- Arrange them in the order needed.
- Encourage your child to *look* first, then to choose the first piece needed.
- Then look and choose the next piece until the task is completed.
- When your child can manage this easily set out the pieces needed but not in order, asking them to *look and choose*.

Your child can also practise the skills of looking and sorting out problems around the home. Ask them to help to set the table. First show an example and then give them the pieces to do it themselves. You could also ask them to sort the cutlery into knife, fork and spoon areas. Ask them to line up shoes in matching pairs.



Object and Picture Games



Object Recognition

Gather some familiar objects e.g. teddy, cup, plate, spoon, ball.

Place two/three objects in front of the child.

Ask the child for one of them e.g. 'Give me teddy', 'Show me the ball'.

If your child can do this, give him lots of praise.

Increase the number of objects to five or six.

Object Matching

Gather sets of familiar objects, e.g. two teddies, two cups, two plates, two spoons and a box for putting objects in.

Place one object from each set in a box and keep the remaining objects separate. Show the child one of the objects which is not in the box and name it e.g. 'Here is teddy'.

Show the child the box of objects and ask 'Can you find another teddy?'

If the child can do this activity give him lots of praise. If not, reduce the number of objects in the box and try again.

Activities should be started with a small number of objects and increased as the child gets more familiar with the task.

Picture Recognition

Gather pictures of familiar objects e.g. teddy, cup, plate, spoon, ball.

Show the child a single picture and name it e.g. 'teddy'.

Take the child's hand and point to the picture as you repeat the word. Then ask the child 'Where is teddy?' and see if he will point to it himself.

It will take some practice until the child is able to do this himself.

Repeat this with a number of different pictures until the child is familiar with them.

Advance this by placing two different pictures in front of the child and asking 'where is teddy?' Repeat with the picture in a different position and then with three or more pictures.

Object to Picture Matching

Take two pictures e.g. ball and teddy and place them on the table in front of the child. Name the pictures and get the child to point to them as you name them.

Give the child one of the objects e.g. ball and ask him to put it on the picture of the ball, saying 'Put the ball with the ball'. Do the same with the other object.

Gradually increase the number of pictures and objects.

Self Help Skills



As children grow up we expect them to become more independent and to do more things for themselves. As parents it is important to allow your child to try to do things independently and to keep trying and practicing until they master the skill. Allow enough time, give plenty of encouragement and be positive. Self help skills can become part of your daily routine and here are some handy hints to make them fun.

Dressing Skills

When teaching dressing skills always allow plenty of time so find a time when you are not in a rush. Children usually learn to take *off* their clothes first, often starting with socks and shoes. When learning we may need to start the procedure such as unfastening the button and pulling trousers down to the ankles. Allow your child to pull them over their feet. Next time go to the knees, then hips and then all the way down. When dressing we can reverse this Start by putting on the trousers and pulling them up to the hips and asking your child to pull them up to the waist. Next time you bring them to the knees, then ankles and finally allowing the child to step in independently.

Playing dressing up with larger clothes is a great way to practice these skills.



Feeding Skills

Children will have lots of fun learning skills with a tea set or you can use small household cups, bowls, jugs and cutlery.



- Fill a bowl with rice and allow them to spoon it into another bowl.
- Practise pouring water from a teapot or plastic jug into a cup. Spilling is part of learning.
- Practise cutting up soft fruit like a banana.
- Practise spreading soft butter on bread.
- Have a tea party and use lots of language like please and thank-you, full and empty, more, all done.
- Practise tidying up and cleaning up spills.
- Allow your child to help wash up at the sink and to dry plastic plates and cups.