

Children, Young People and Families Occupational  
Therapy Team

# EARLY DEVELOPMENT SKILLS

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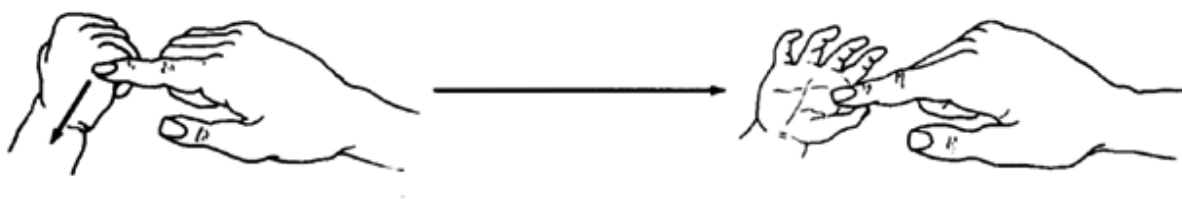
## Activities to help develop gripping, reaching, and hand-eye co-ordination



Most babies are born with a 'grasping reflex'. If you put your finger in their hand, the hand automatically grips it - so tightly you can lift up the child.

Usually this reflex goes away, and gradually the child learns to hold things and let go as she chooses.

If she keeps her hand closed, stroke the outer edge of the hand from little finger to wrist. This often causes the child to lift and open her hand.



When the child opens her hands well, but has trouble holding on:

Place an object in her hand, and bend her fingers around it. Be sure the thumb is opposite the fingers.



Gradually let go of her hand and pull the object up against her fingers or twist it from side to side.



When you think she has a firm grip, let go. Repeat several times in each of the child's hands.



After the child can hold an object placed in her hand, encourage her to reach and grasp an object that just touches her fingertips. First touch the top of her hand-then place it below her fingertips.

Encourage the child to grasp by offering her colourful toys, musical instruments e.g. bells or something to eat on a stick.



Hang interesting toys and bells where the child can see and reach for them.



This way the child learns to move her hand forward to take hold of a toy.

Place favourite toys to the side, which helps her practice shifting her body weight for reaching.

## **Prone Position (Tummy Time)**

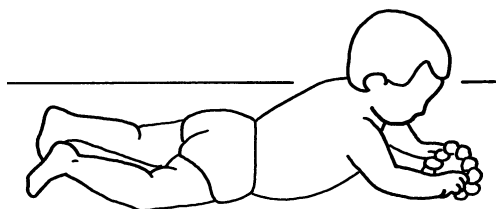


The Prone position enables a child to:

- Develop head control
- Develop muscles in the arms and the shoulders as the child pushes up
- Develop back muscles
- Develop ability to shift body weight when reaching
- Preparation for kneeling and crawling.

In order for your child to develop the above skills they should be positioned with their head up, in line with the body, and with the chin slightly tucked in. Their arms should be out from under their body with their elbows directly under or slightly in front of the shoulders.

Encourage your child to lift her head and push up on her arms by singing, talking, making funny faces at each other.

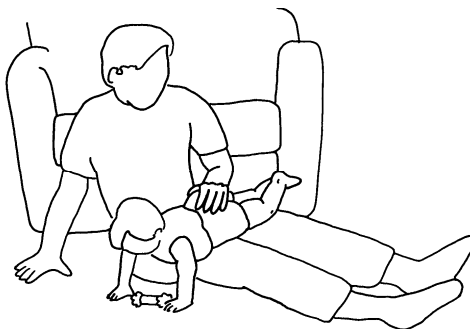


Other ideas to keep her interested:

- Place favourite toys a short distance away to encourage her to reach.
- Put a child's safety mirror or colourful pictures in front of her to see.
- Put a book on the floor or leaning on cushions and read a story.
- Encourage your child to lift her arms to reach and stack blocks and knock them down.
- Roll a ball or car to each other.

If she will not tolerate lying in prone and becomes frustrated try:

- Sit on the floor with you back against a wall or furniture and lay the child face down across your lap.



- Roll up a medium sized towel and place it under your child's chest for support
- Use a wedged cushion or support.

## **Range of Motion Exercises**

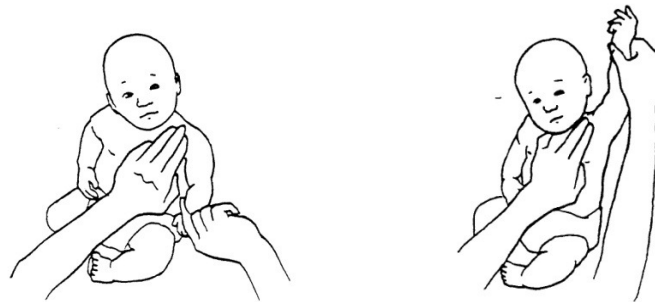
These activities are very important to reduce the tightness of the muscles and to ensure that the joints are flexible and easy to move. The exercises should be done at least once a day but more if time permits. A good time to do them is after your child's bath or nappy change.

The exercises should be done slowly and steadily – NEVER FORCE A JOINT TO MOVE. The exercises should be done with both the left and right arms.

### **Exercises for the Shoulder**

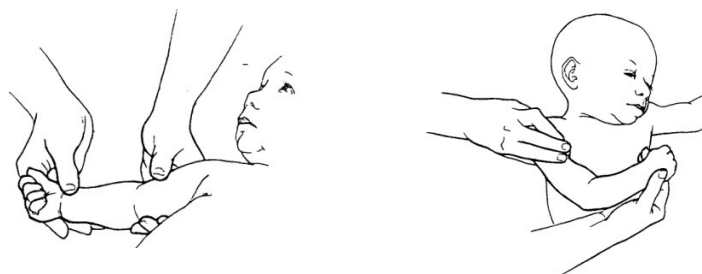
#### **Shoulder Flexion (moving the arm upwards)**

Hold the shoulder with one hand and the wrist with the other hand. Move the arm slowly upwards so the hand is up over the head. The palm of the hand should be facing inwards towards the child's body.



#### **Shoulder Adduction (Moving the arm across the body)**

Lay the child on his/her back. Stabilize the shoulder with one hand. Hold the wrist with the other hand. Bend the arm across the body toward the other arm.



## Shoulder Rotation

Lay the child on their back, elbow bent and arm out to the side. Hold the elbow joint with one hand and the wrist with the other hand. Move the arm upwards so the palm of the hand is facing upwards, then move the arm downwards so the palm is facing down.



## Shoulder Abduction (moving the arm away from the body)

Lay the child on their back. Hold the shoulder with one hand and the forearm with the other hand. Bend the arm sideways away from the body, bringing the arm straight out to the side.

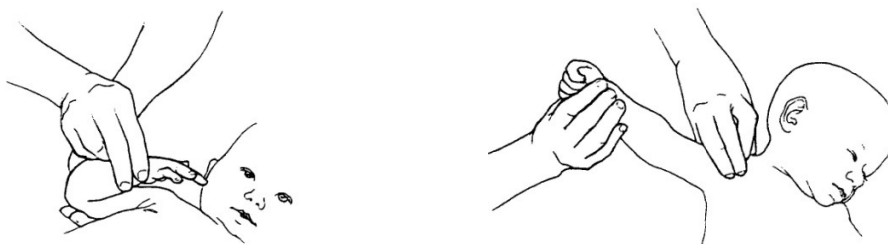




## Exercises for the Elbow, Forearm and Wrist

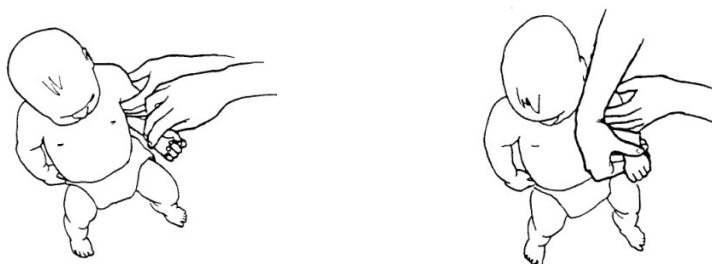
### Elbow flexion and extension (bending the elbow)

Lay the child on their back with their arm straight out to the side. Hold the elbows with one hand and the wrist with their other hand. Bend the elbows gently then straighten the elbow.



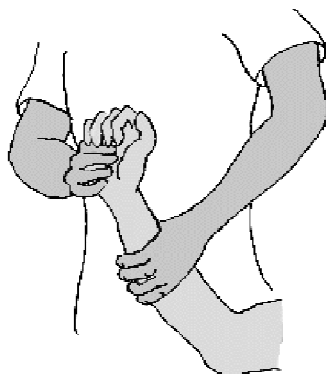
### Forearm Supination and Pronation (turning the palm over)

Lay the child on their back or have them sitting between your legs. Bend the elbow but keep the arm close to the body. Hold the upper arm with one hand and the wrist with the other hand. Turn the forearm over so the palm is facing upwards, then turn the forearm over so the palm is facing downwards.



### Wrist Flexion and Extension (bending the wrist)

Hold the forearm above the wrist with one hand. Place the thumb and fingers of your other hand on opposite sides of the palm. Holding the hand in this way, bend it up at the wrist, then down at the wrist, about 90 degrees. The fingers will straighten naturally.



### Thumb Flexion and Extension

Supporting the child's wrist, place your fingers at the base of the child's thumb. Gently straighten the thumb out to the side to stretch the "web space" then move the thumb to little finger.

