

Occupational Therapy: Children, Young People & Families Department

Early Years Activities

Fine motor ideas for Early Years settings



Early Years Activities

Aims: To develop the foundation skills for fine motor skills:

- hip and trunk stability,
- shoulder girdle stability,
- body awareness,
- dissociation of upper limb movements,
- visual tracking,
- hand awareness/movement
- crossing midline,
- motor planning,
- sensory skills,
- visual-motor integration,
- balance.

Functional outcomes: Moving around their environment, mark-making, using hands to manipulate toys, school readiness.

Further information

You can find more information and resources on our website:

www.swft.nhs.uk/our-services/children-and-young-peoples-services/occupational-therapy

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2. Follow-the-line
3. Tightrope walk
4. Mirror mirror
5. Through the hoop
6. Animal walks
7. Skydrawing
8. Giant tower
9. Stepping stones
10. Simon says
11. Statues

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2. Bowling
3. Ball roll
4. Marble roll
5. Skittles
6. Balloon bash
7. Catching
8. Kicking

Sense of touch

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2. Jelly excavation
3. What's in the bag?
4. Playdough treasure hunt

Mark-making

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2. Painting with cars
3. Handprints
4. Stickers and stamps
5. Matching shapes
6. Shaving foam drawing
7. Sand drawing
8. Rainbow drawing
9. String shapes

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2. Bubble pop
3. Egg box sorting
4. Spooning flat marbles
5. Bean gluing

Body movements and awareness

Clothes pegs

“Pegs” – Place clothes pegs on a jumper/t-shirt; one on each shoulder and knee and either side of waist. Remove clothes pegs by using the opposite hand to the side of the body where the peg is placed (i.e. right hand to remove peg from left shoulder). Ensure pegs are removed by squeezing them to open them, rather than just pulling them off.

Follow the line

Make a path along the floor using tape or string. Use straight, curved and diagonal lines. Walk with or without shoes. The children can walk, run, crawl or roll, or drive a toy car along it. They can mark the start and finish of the lines with a beanbag or toy. Draw a design on a piece of card and see if the children can copy this with the string.

Tightrope walk

Make a path along the floor using tape or string. Walk along it slowly, with the heel of the front foot touching the heel of the back foot, like a tightrope walker. Try to keep the feet straight on the line.

Mirror mirror

Stand facing a partner. You are going to be each other’s mirror. Decide who is going to lead. Move your body into different positions – your partner must copy you as smoothly as possible. Now swap over so the other person is the leader.

Through the hoop

Place a hula hoop on the floor and stand inside it, now pull it up over your head. You can pretend the hoop makes you invisible! With a partner, hold the hoop out and take it in turns to climb through it, holding it high or low.

Animal walks

Can you walk like a cat or dog on all fours? What about like a bear on hands and feet, or a crab? Can you hop like a bunny across the floor?

Skydrawing

Use a ribbon attached to a stick, or turn the lights down and use a lightstick. Draw shapes in the air, using big arm movements. Start with vertical lines and horizontal lines, then curves, diagonal lines, zigzags and shapes. If appropriate, make letter shapes too. Take it in turns to draw a shape or letter and see if the others can guess what it is.

Giant tower

Build a tower out of empty cardboard boxes (shoe boxes or cereal boxes are ideal) or cushions.



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Stepping stones

Set out a course of stepping stones using small mats, pieces of coloured card, hula hoops, plastic stepping stones or cushions. Ones that are flat on the ground will be easier; taller or less stable stepping stones will be more difficult. Slowly make your way across the stepping stones. To encourage children to go slowly you could make it into a game, such as don't wake the pirate (wolf/witch/etc...) where one child has to turn their back and listen out for the person sneaking across the stepping stones.

Simon says

Who can correctly complete the instructions?

Statues

The children move around the room in different ways (robot, jelly person, different types of animals, hopping, walking backwards). When you shout "freeze" they have to stop completely still. You could also do this to music.

Hand-eye co-ordination

Scarf juggling

Start with just one colourful scarf, throw it up into the air and see if you can catch it. Then try with two or three. Work with a partner and throw to each other.

Bowling

Use a large, soft ball. Roll it at some skittles (you can use empty cereal boxes, or kitchen roll tubes instead) and see how many you can knock over.

Ball roll

Sitting on the floor in a circle, roll the ball to each other. If a large ball is too easy, try a smaller ball. Try standing up, so that you have to bend down to roll the ball. Try when sitting or standing at a table, using a smaller ball.

Marble roll

Sit across the table from each other, or on the floor. Roll a small ball or marble across the table and try to catch it. Start slowly and get faster. Try catching the marble under a cup.

Skittles

Place some skittles about 1 metre away and then try to knock them over with the ball. If that becomes too easy, move further away from the skittles.

Balloon bash

Try to get a balloon from one end of the room to the other without letting it touch the floor and without holding on to it. Work as a team or race against each other.

Catching

Working with a partner or as a group, throw a soft ball or balloon to each other. Think about how big the ball is and how far apart your hands need to be.

Kicking

This is best done outside! Use a soft ball (a beachball is ideal) and practice kicking to each other or into a goal.

Sense of touch

Feely box

Fill a large container with rice, lentils or play sand. Hide some different everyday items or small toys in there: cotton reels, a key, a pencil, a Lego block, etc. Use geometric shapes or letter shapes if you have them. The children take it in turns to reach in to the box and find an object. See if they can tell what it is without looking.

Jelly excavation

Make up some jelly, using a little less water than usual so it's quite stiff. Hide some small toys or pieces of fruit in there (keeping in mind choking hazards) and let the child dig around in the putty to find them.

What's in the bag?

Fill a fabric bag (or pillowcase) with some items of different textures, for example, a furry toy, a pine cone, a bell. See if the child can identify the item without looking.

Playdough treasure hunt

Take a ball of playdough and place some pegs in it, then scrunch it back up to hide the pegs. The child needs to use both hands to find the pegs in the playdough.

Mark-making

Water painting

A good activity for outside. Use big paintbrushes and buckets of water to paint walls, fences or the floor. Use big arm movements.



Painting with cars

Why not try dipping toy trains or cars in paint and driving them around a large sheet of paper to make patterns?

Handprints

Use some lovely thick poster paint and make hand (or foot) prints on a big piece of paper.

Stickers and stamps

Prepare a big piece of paper by drawing a clear line or shape. The children can use stickers or stampers to follow the line.

Matching shapes

Recognising shapes is an important foundation for being able to write. Play games that involve matching shapes, such as pairs games

Shaving foam drawing

Fill a shallow tray with shaving foam (and maybe a little food colouring) and encourage the children to draw in the foam.

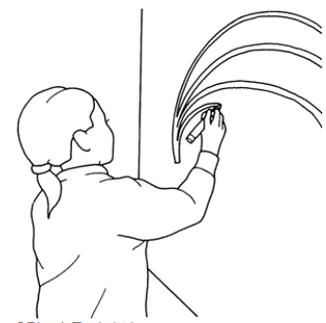
Sand drawing

Fill a wide, shallow tray or container with sand, sugar or salt. It helps if the base of the container contrasts with the colour of the sand.

Now draw some shapes in the sand. Start with some straight lines (up and down), circles and squares, then diagonals and crosses. Start by demonstrating the shape and asking the children to imitate what you do. Next, show them a picture of the shape and ask them to draw it. Try with eyes open and eyes closed.

Rainbow drawing

Stand in front of a chalkboard or whiteboard, or pin a large piece of paper to the wall. Using a chunky marker pen, crayon or chalk, draw a big, curved rainbow shape. Stand still and draw it as big as you can! Keep going over the shape in



different colours. Make sure you are reaching across your body to draw the curve. You can also try using a stamp pen on it or placing stickers along the rainbow to decorate it.

String shapes

Using string or coloured wool, glue and card, make tactile pre-writing shapes or letters. Start with the simpler shapes such as straight lines, then try curves and crosses, circles, squares and triangles. Add paint or glitter to make them really colourful.

Strong hands

Grasp and release

Being able to grasp and release objects is the foundation for more advanced control. Games that work on this skill include ball towers and click-clacky track.



Simple games of dropping a ball into a container are also ideal. You can use ball-pit balls and fill a basket!

Also try:

- **Shape sorters** are also great for refining this grasp and release into more of a manipulation skill involving turning the hand, and on matching shapes or colours.
- **Towers**, built from blocks or stacked cups, work on precision and hand-eye co-ordination.
- **Large pegboards.**
- **Peg puzzles.**



Nuts and bolts

Using either plastic toy nuts and bolts or real nuts and bolts, ask the children to undo and then do them up again.

Hammer time

Hammering toys are great for building grip strength and hand-eye co-ordination.



Hungry Horace

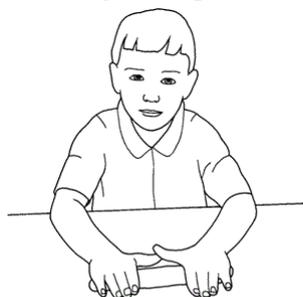
In one hand, hold a tennis ball which has had a slot cut in it to make a “mouth”. Squeeze the ball to keep the mouth open and then feed Horace with coins, buttons or small pompoms.

Pouring games

Fill a plastic jug with water (you might want to add some colouring to make it easier for the children to see). Make sure the jug is not too heavy for the child to lift. Pour the water into different size containers. For a less damp option, use rice, dried beans or lentils.

Playdough games

Play-dough snakes



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Use both hands together to gradually roll an even-sized length of dough. Ensure the body remains still, the shoulders relaxed and the arms move from the shoulders. Isolate the thumb and each individual finger consecutively to press down on the snake of dough; first one hand then the other.

Pinch/squeeze the snake between thumb and individual finger tips consecutively, one hand and then the other.

Roll the snake into a ball on the tabletop with one hand. Pick up and squeeze as hard as possible with one hand. Roll dough into a ball between two hands and squeeze as hard as possible using the other hand.

Playdough pinch pots

Take some playdough and warm it up by squashing and squeezing it in the hands. Now roll it into a ball. Press your thumb into the centre of the ball and then pinch the clay between thumb and forefingers to press the ball into a pot shape. When you've finished you can decorate with little plastic pegs or beads, or etch designs into it with a pencil.



Playdough nest

Warm the playdough up by squashing and squeezing it into a ball. Break off a big chunk and roll it into a ball. Now pinch and press round the edges to turn it into a nest. Next, break off smaller chunks of the playdough and roll these into eggs. Try to roll these out between the tip of your thumb and forefinger.

Playdough sausage and beans

Warm the playdough up by squashing and squeezing it into a ball. Break off some chunks. Roll some of them out into "sausages" and turn the others into "beans" by rolling them between thumb and forefinger.

Play-dough Pizza

Roll out the playdough using a rolling pin. Use stamps and cutters to cut out shapes. Use these to make 'biscuits' or 'pizza'. Decorate with small objects such as beads or pegs.

Playdough dinosaurs

Warm the playdough up by squashing and squeezing it into a ball. Roll it into a sausage or a ball to make a dinosaur. Add beads or pegs for eyes, counters or coins for scales.

Playdough shapes

Roll out the playdough and form it into a thin sausage. Now see if you can “draw” shapes with it. Can you make:

- A straight line
- A curve
- A circle
- A square
- A triangle

If appropriate, try with letter shapes too. Start with the adult modelling the shapes for the children to copy, then see if they can make them from memory. Add some pegs or beads along the shape to decorate it.

Skilled hands

Tearing and scrunching paper

Use sheets of newspaper or coloured tissue paper. Encourage a pincer grip and tear the paper into strips. Scrunch the paper up into balls to use in artwork.

Bubble pop

Blow some bubbles and see if the children can pop them using just their index finger.

Egg box sorting

Give each child a selection of small items, pompoms, buttons, dried beans (being aware of choking hazards). Get them to sort these into different sections of the egg box (or ice cube tray or muffin tray), sorting by colour or size etc. Encourage them to use a pincer grip. You can also try this with play tweezers, or using clothes pegs as tweezers.



Spooning Flat Marbles

Place two bowls on a tray. Fill one bowl with flat marbles (the kind used for flower displays). Children use a spoon to move the marbles from the left bowl to the right bowl.



Bean Gluing

Draw a simple picture or shape on a piece of construction paper with a pencil. The child traces the pencil lines with glue and glues dried beans onto the design. Gripping the beans with their fingers is good fine motor practice.