

Fine Motor Skill Development in Outdoor Play

For children who prefer to play outdoors rather than sit at a table and develop fine motor skills, there is opportunity to develop these skills during play. The following are some examples which may need adult support to set-up as well as to encourage children to participate in.

1. Sidewalk Chalk

- a. Encourage child to hold chalk with a tripod grasp. Smaller chalkboard size chalk is helpful rather than larger diameter sidewalk chalk.
- b. Use chalk on easels or walls (or any vertical surface) to encourage proper grasp.
- c. Create 'rubblings' using old crayons, paper and items found outdoors to see what types of designs children can find.

2. Puzzles

- a. Use puzzles that are foam or otherwise durable for outdoor use. You may want to play a game such as hiding the pieces on a treasure hunt and then put the puzzle together.
- b. Ensure that the number of pieces in the puzzle is suitable for your child's ability and will not overwhelm them.
- c. Encourage children to participate in puzzle building with siblings/peers.

3. Toys

- a. Spray bottles are a great toy to encourage grip strength.
- b. Bubble wands are great to practice grip as well as to encourage finger isolation by having the child pop the bubbles with different fingers (eg. pop bubbles with their index finger or thumb).
- c. Jacks – encourage hand manipulation and fine motor skills.

4. Relay Races

- a. For those children who like to participate in relay races, set up obstacles such as the water and sponge game where children take soaked sponges from a bucket of water to another empty bucket and wring them out. See who gets the most water in the second bucket.
- b. Pick up objects (blocks, cotton balls, beads, etc.) using various sized tongs and strawberry hullers, transferring them between containers.
- c. Hang laundry on the line using clothes pins.

5. Painting

- a. Shaving Cream – use shaving cream on a vertical surface such as a window, easel, sliding door, overturned plastic picnic table, etc. Children can make designs in the shaving cream using their fingers. To clean use water to rinse or use paintbrushes. Paintbrushes with water can be used to rinse the shaving cream while making more designs. Encourage proper grasp with the paintbrush.
- b. Water paint – use water and paint brushes to create designs on sidewalks or driveways. The designs will dry quickly in the summer sun & no mess to clean-up.
- c. Window Writers – Crayola® makes Window Writers which are markers that are used to create drawings on windows. Regular washable markers can also be used and easily cleaned with water.

6. Water Play
 - a. Encourage children to water the garden (with supervision) or to play with the hose as the nozzle offers great opportunity to strengthen grip.

7. Gardening
 - a. Encourage children to pull weeds, pick-up small twigs, stones, etc. and put in a bucket.
 - b. Plant seeds.
 - c. Water with a garden hose to encourage grip strength and open web-space in hand.

8. Other
 - a. Make mud pies or play in the sand.
 - b. You can practice drawing in the sand with small sticks and create the pre-printing strokes of o, |, - or write a note.
 - c. Use foam alphabet puzzle pieces to 'stamp' driveway with wet letter. Trace with sidewalk chalk.
 - d. Play Cat's Cradle. Search on-line for samples.
 - e. Make Marshmallow sculptures using small marshmallows & dampen slightly so they'll stick together.
 - f. Play with playdough, silly putty or plasticine.
 - g. String beads, large buttons, pasta or cereal.

Please ask your Occupational Therapist if you have any questions or concerns about the recommendations provided.