

# CORE SKILL: MOVE

## Fine Motor



### What You Need to Know

Young children’s fine motor skills – which include the development of small muscle control, strength, and coordination – are critical to their development of self-help and learning skills. As these skills grow, children are better able to manipulate, experiment with, and actively participate in the world around them. Toddlers are working hard to master skills such as eating with utensils and dressing/undressing. To develop these skills, toddlers need time and space to practice manipulating objects and their bodies purposefully during exploration, play, and daily routines.

### Things to Consider

It’d be faster, easier, and less messy if we did *everything* for children (e.g., put on coats, clean up, or serve food). But it’s important to give children opportunities to try using those little hands and fingers to button, snap, scoop, build, pour, and serve. This takes time, so sometimes the greatest teaching tool for fine motor skills is patience. For example, it may feel like an eternity for you as you watch children struggle to zip up their jackets, but they are practicing fine motor control and learning to persist on a challenging task. The sense of accomplishment that children experience as they begin to master these skills is well worth the wait.

Collaborate with families to support the development of fine motor skills during everyday activities, including feeding, dressing, clean up, etc. Be mindful and respectful of each family’s cultural values and perspectives.

### Development of Fine Motor Skills

Between 9 and 18 months, children may:	Between 16 and 36 months, children may:
Pick up small objects with their thumb, index, and middle fingers (e.g., using pincer grip).	Open cabinets, drawers, and boxes.
Bang two toys together.	Hold large writing objects, such as crayons in approximate thumb-and-finger grip.
Mimic a hand clap, wave, or play pat-a-cake without much help.	Attempt and cut with scissors.
Begin to stack two or three blocks.	Dig and scoop sand or water.

### Setting the Stage

Activities and materials that support the development of fine motor skills:

- ◆ Build with a variety of materials (e.g., small wooden blocks, blocks that snap together, blocks that connect such as large Legos, or layering peg boards).
- ◆ Use play-dough or clay to mold and sculpt. The kneading and forming builds fine motor skills.
- ◆ Encourage the use of small tools (e.g., utensils during meals, brushes, or crayons).
- ◆ Use music to get those hands clapping, opening, closing, and moving one finger at a time.
- ◆ Offer puzzles of different sizes and difficulty. Grasping and moving pieces to fit together supports fine motor skills.
- ◆ ‘Follow the Leader’ games (e.g., opening and closing hands in different patterns, and patting different body parts).
- ◆ Place desired materials in boxes or bags to provide children with opportunities to practice opening and unzipping. During clean up time, encourage children to close and zip containers shut.
- ◆ For children with visual impairments, be sure to provide high-contrast manipulatives to support their ability to coordinate and manipulate small tools.



## Intentional Teaching Practices to Support Fine Motor Development

OBSERVE	<b>OBSERVE</b>  Carefully observe children's use of fine motor skills. Take note of your own behavior as well. Are there routines/tasks that you are doing for children that they can be more involved in or independent with? Are there enough opportunities for children to practice opening, twisting, turning, and grasping?
FOCUS	<b>Narrate or Label Use of Fine Motor Skills</b>  Intentionally focus children's attention on the use of fine motor skills. Demonstrate how to do things by modeling and describing your own use of fine motor skills. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◆ "This page is hard to turn. I'm going to use my pointer finger and thumb to help me pick up this page."</li><li>◆ "You remembered to point your thumb up towards the sky when you use scissors to help you cut the paper. You are opening and closing your hand to make big cuts!"</li></ul>
SCAFFOLD I	<b>Promote Child Autonomy</b>  Find the right amount of support to help children be successful <b>without</b> taking over the task. Focus on modifying activities so that children can complete them as independently as possible. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◆ If a child can't hold and manipulate the watering can or spray bottle, provide a cup with water that they can dump rather than watering the plant yourself.</li><li>◆ If a child can't manipulate the paintbrush, provide a larger/thicker brush that they can grasp.</li></ul>
SCAFFOLD II	<b>Encourage Children to Try New Tools or Grips</b>  Prompt children to try new tools or grips that are out of their comfort zone: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◆ "I'm holding my brush this way. It gives me more control; can you try it?"</li><li>◆ "Have you tried using a spoon?"</li><li>◆ "Try holding the tongs like this between your thumb and fingers (<i>demonstrate</i>). Pinch hard to hold onto that cotton ball!"</li></ul>
KEEP IT GOING	Consider what you learned from observing children on Monday as well as their reaction to your Focus and Scaffolds. Find ways to build the activities in the Setting the Stage into your regular routines.