

# 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 children develop these skills, they are better able to manipulate, experiment with, and actively participate in the world around them. Preschoolers are learning to master skills such as manipulating tools (e.g., pencils, scissors, paintbrushes, forks) and are increasingly able to direct their movements to complete complex tasks (e.g., drawing, writing, building, stringing beads, buttoning shirts). To develop these skills, preschoolers need time and space to practice manipulating objects, tools, and their bodies purposefully.

### Things to Consider

It’d be faster, easier, and possibly less messy if we did *everything* for children (e.g., zip up coats, clean up, serve food). But it’s important to give children opportunities to try using those little hands and fingers to try to button, snap, scoop, build, pour, and serve. 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 their fine motor skills is well worth the wait.

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

### Development of Fine Motor Skills

Between 36 and 48 months, children may:	Between 48 and 60 months, children may:
Perform simple hand-eye tasks (e.g., draw simple shapes, cut paper with scissors).	Perform tasks that require more complex hand-eye coordination (e.g., cut shapes, draw letter-like forms).
Demonstrate limited precision and control in more complex tasks.	Demonstrate increasing precision and control.
	Use a pincer grip to hold and manipulate tools for writing, drawing, and painting.

### Setting the Stage

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

- ◆ Encourage the use of small tools (e.g., pencils, scissors, utensils, brushes, crayons, small tools).
- ◆ Build with a variety of materials (e.g., small wooden blocks, blocks that snap together, blocks that connect such as large Legos, layering peg boards).
- ◆ Play-dough or clay to mold and sculpt. The kneading and forming builds fine motor skills.
- ◆ Use music/songs to get those hands clapping, opening, closing, and moving one finger at a time, or folding/weaving together in more complex ways.
- ◆ Encourage play with puzzles to support children’s development of fine motor skills related to grips and hand-eye coordination.
- ◆ Hide small objects in a sensory bin for children to search, find, and pick out of the bin.
- ◆ Rip paper into strips or small pieces. These can later be used in crafts and art projects!
- ◆ For children with visual impairments, be sure to provide high-contrast manipulatives to support their ability to coordinate and manipulate small tools.
- ◆ 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.



# Intentional Teaching Practices to Support Fine Motor Skills

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 and independent with? Are there enough opportunities for children to practice twisting, opening, writing, cutting, and grasping? How do children’s skills differ from one another? Are some children more inclined to choose activities that require fine motor skills? Do some children avoid tasks that require fine motor skills?
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 use of fine motor skills. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◆ “You are using your alligator fingers to pick up the beads on the floor.”</li><li>◆ “I see you pinching the zipper tightly as you pull it up. You are working hard to zip your jacket!”</li><li>◆ “This circle is tricky to cut out. I am using my helper hand to help me turn the paper while I cut.”</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. Try a few supportive prompts before jumping in to assist (i.e., verbally prompt by saying, “Try holding the paper with your helper hand,” <i>then</i> offer an additional prompt by tapping their helper hand if needed, etc.). <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◆ If a child has difficulty cutting, offer thicker paper and/or hold it steady so they can still complete the task.</li><li>◆ If a child struggles to write with a pencil, offer a broken crayon, “golf” pencil, or piece of chalk so they can still independently complete the task (these items are easier to grasp correctly).</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>◆ “Let’s try putting your thumb in the top hole of the scissors. Now open/shut, open/shut.”</li><li>◆ “I’m holding the screwdriver from the top. I can twist it better because I have more control. Can you try?”</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.