

# THE Building blocks for learning



Promote motor development by giving children exciting opportunities to use their fingers says **Alison Harris...**



This series introduces basic skills for nursery-aged children in order to prepare them as fully as possible for transition into school. Previous articles have considered the issue of developing body awareness and gross motor skills; now we consider the development of fine motor skills to positively assist the child to learn independence skills and play.

## Developing fine motor skills

Hand skills develop in a pattern – you have to be able to do the larger movements before you can have control and accuracy. In nursery, watch how many different ways children use their hands without even thinking about it. It's vital to offer an exciting environment where little fingers cannot resist getting involved.

Fine Motor Skills to watch out for include using both hands together and

crossing the midline, and using each hand for a different task – perhaps one hand holding and the other hand opening a container, for example. Look for the different grips being used:

- PALMAR GRIP** – the 'power grip' seen when hands need to grasp a large item firmly such as carrying a large toy.
- PINCER GRIP** – the first intricate grip, used for picking up small objects between thumb and index finger.
- TRIPOD GRIP** – the functional grasp



which develops to perform actions such as holding a pencil.

Nurseries are fantastic at providing innovative activities, but here are some that may be new for you, which can be a useful resource to use when you note that a child has difficulty developing in one of the above areas:

Fine Motor Skills	Method to encourage acquisition of skills
Finger isolation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Pointing activities – hide a toy in the nursery and see who can be the first to point to it.</li> <li>■ Finger puppets – make the puppets wave to each other or dance on the table.</li> <li>■ Make sure you have plenty of push button toys.</li> <li>■ Don't forget lots of action songs!</li> </ul>
Palmar Grip	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Crumple sheets of tissue paper to makes pictures. Lay the paper flat on the table and ask the child to crumple it up with just one hand!</li> <li>■ Make sure you put favourite equipment in containers for the children to open to access. Jars and margarine tubs are ideal.</li> <li>■ Pump action water sprayers are great for boosting grip strength. Develop a plant corner which needs lots of spraying!</li> </ul>
Pincer Grip	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Pincer grip should be pad to pad, not thumb to the side of index finger. Encourage good habits.</li> <li>■ Play simple card-matching games, but as the pairs are matched, peg them onto a washing line. Who has most cards on their washing line? Don't throw away tiny chalks – keep them to use to encourage pincer grip and lay down good practice for when it's time to develop a pencil grip.</li> </ul>
Tripod Grip – thumb, index and middle finger working together.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Make pencil case-sized felt bags with large buttonholes for an easy introduction to doing buttons. Keep interesting items in the bag to find each day.</li> <li>■ Large paintbrushes are a first stage to holding a tool in a tripod grip. Avoid children holding the brush like a dagger and encourage the tripod grip as they paint.</li> <li>■ Try 'threading' crayons through a ping pong ball so that an early tripod grip is established and the developing hand is supported.</li> <li>■ Keep all colouring and painting tools chunky, and help the child to arrange their hand in a tripod grip from the start. This pays huge dividends as the action becomes a habit.</li> </ul>