



Month 4: Developing Hands and Fingers Preschooler Activities

Sponges and Buckets

You will need: 2 kitchen sponges, water and 2 small buckets or bowls. Fill one of the buckets 1/3 full of water. Demonstrate how to place a sponge in the bucket of water and fill the sponge with water. Show the child how to move the full sponge to the other bucket and then squeeze the water out of the sponge into the bucket. Encourage your child to move the water from the first to the second bucket using the sponge. When she understands how to use the sponge place the buckets further apart so that she will need to run between the buckets. Make it a race and make it fun. For a larger group create a relay race and see which team can get the most water into the second bucket.

To make this activity harder:

- Use a variety of different sizes and densities of sponges, such as a car sponge. The larger and denser sponges will take more pressure to squeeze than the smaller and lighter sponges.
- Substitute a washcloth for the sponge. The larger, less firm material requires better skill to manipulate with both hands.

String Art

You will need: paper, newspaper, paint in bowls and string of different lengths. Lay out the string pieces, paper and the paint in bowls. Encourage your child to pick up the string between the pads of his thumb and index finger. Have him dip the string in a bowl of paint. Instruct him to lay the string on the paper to leave the imprint of the string, and then remove it. Have him continue until he has a fun design. Instead of string you can use a pipe cleaner, or uncooked spaghetti.

To make this activity harder:

- Encourage the child to make shapes; letters by having them imitate your designs.
- Use longer pieces of string that require more controlled placement on the paper.

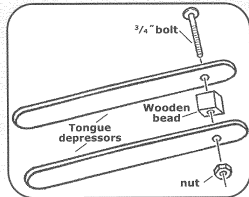
Tear-it-up Designs

In order to create a tear-it-up design you will need construction paper and glue. Demonstrate how to rip paper. Show your child how one hand moves away from you and one hand moves toward you when ripping. Have your child place his hands at the top of a medium sized piece of paper. Place your hands over his hands and demonstrate how to rip paper. Make sure your child is using the pads of the fingers and thumbs rather than a whole hand grasp when ripping. Continue ripping smaller and smaller pieces of paper. Glue the ripped pieces of paper onto a paper to create a design. Or have the child fill in a template to create a flower, pumpkin, letter, shape or number. You can use a variety of

types of paper like tissue paper, newspaper or magazines. Thin paper is harder to control, and thick paper provides more resistance to the fingers and thumb. Challenge your child to tear out simple shapes such as circles or squares.

Feeding our Furry Friends

Pretend play is always fun for kids. And this way they can “feed” their furry stuffed friends and work on their hand strength. Have your child gather her favourite stuffed animals or dolls. Her furry friends will be feed some cereal using small tongs*. *Tongs can be made from two tongue depressors attached to a small piece of wood. Or you may find small tongs at the dollar store or in a variety of games.



To Make Tweezers:

Drill a small hole 1" down and centered in two tongue depressors. Place a 1/2" wooden bead between the two depressors. Use a nut and 3/4" bolt to attach.

Give each furry friend their own bowl. Demonstrate how to close and open the tongs using just one hand, with the tips of your fingers and thumb on the tong's surface. Have the child try opening and closing the tongs. Once the child is successful with opening and closing the tongs, demonstrate picking up a piece of cereal. Have her place the cereal in the bowl in front of the first stuffed animal. Encourage the child to continue feeding the animals in this way until all the food is gone.

To make this activity harder:

- Have the child sort up to 6 different cereals into 6 different bowls.
- Use small containers, encouraging the child to have better accuracy when placing the food.
- Place a piece of cereal or cosmetic sponge in the palm of the child's hand and ask her to hold it with the ring finger and pinky while operating the tongs with the index finger, middle finger and thumb.
- As the child gets more proficient with the tongs, have her try this activity using chopsticks that are held together with a rubber band around the top.

Window Washers

Kids always enjoy helping out so why not “wash” some windows/walls/trees. Using a pump-style squirt bottle filled with water, show your child how to spray the window with the squirt bottle. Instruct her to use her index finger and middle fingers to push on the pump while her ring finger and pinky wrap around the bottle to hold it. The child also will use the other hand to hold and stabilize the bottle.

You can also make art with squirt bottles. Hang a large piece of paper on the wall and fill the squirt bottle with water coloured with food colouring (make sure the colour is dense) and let the child create a masterpiece.

To challenge your child you can also use water guns, and squirt bottles of varying sizes.

Polka Dot Flowers

You will need: plastic eyedroppers, coloured food dye, small containers of water, coffee filters.

Have the child help you squeeze 1-3 drops of dye into the water. Use darker colours of food dye to provide a strong contrast. Encourage the child to practice squeezing water in and out of the eyedropper. Have her use the pads of her fingers/thumb when she pinches the eyedropper. Once the child understands how to control the eyedropper, begin to dye the coffee filters with different colours to make tie-dyed flowers.

Big-Button Button-Up

Give the child a shirt or jacket with at least 3 buttons $\frac{3}{4}$ " to $1\frac{1}{4}$ " in diameter. Or you can create a homemade buttoning board by sewing buttons and button-holes on a piece of fabric, and if you're a really good sewer create pockets with buttons and hide treasures for your child to find. Demonstrate how to push the buttons through the buttonholes. Then it's your child's turn. Encourage your child to continue practicing until he or she becomes proficient with buttoning and unbuttoning. If you see your child struggling with buttons here are a few suggestions:

- Provide repeated demonstrations and models of the actions required for buttons.
- Place buttons part way through the holes, and then have the child pull them the rest of the way through.
- You can also increase the size of the buttonholes to more than twice the size of the buttons. Have your child practice pulling the buttons through those holes. When he/she is proficient with these buttonholes, try the original activity again.

To give your child more of a challenge:

- Vary the size and type of buttons used.
- Have your child put on a jacket, vest or shirt, then practice buttoning and unbuttoning the garment while wearing it.
- Provide clothes with large buttons for the children to use when playing dress-up or house.

Hole Punch Art

To make some hole punch art you will need some construction paper and a hand held hole punch. First demonstrate how to punch holes, with emphasis on placing the paper in the hole punch and pushing the handles together. It's now the child's turn. Encourage the child to continue punching holes to create creative masterpieces by punching random holes or to punch out designs in the paper. There are also hand held punches in different shapes so they would be fun for your child too. To punch out the different shapes then to glue them onto another paper to create more art.

For more of a challenge:

- Punch out a simple design and encourage your child to imitate the design.
- With a large picture of a simple object as a template (a ball, flower, etc.) have the child punch over-lapping holes around the silhouette of the object to "cut" it out.

Button Rub

To create this piece of artwork you will need: flat buttons or poker chips, poster board, paper, tape and crayons with paper removed. Let the children help you spread the buttons and chips on the table/floor or make "button boards" by gluing the buttons and chips on large pieces of poster board. Cover the chips with a piece of paper. Tape the corners of the paper down and have the crayons ready and close by. With the children lying on their

stomachs around the edges of the paper and with a crayon have the children use their hands to feel around on top of the paper to locate the objects, and then rub their crayons over them so that the outlines appear. Continue feeling and colouring until all the objects have been discovered and coloured.

Variations:

Shape Rub: Cut out large poster board shapes, letters and/or numbers. Put them under the paper and do more rubbings.

Starlight: Use black paper and white crayons. Try it with your eyes closed or while wearing dark sun glasses.

Pinch of Play dough

To work on hand strength, everyone likes to play with play dough. In this activity give each child a large batch of play dough and have the children hide poker chips or buttons. Let the children then pinch off small pieces of play dough from the large piece. While they are pinching the play dough, have them search for the chips. When they find a chip have them clean it off and put it in a small container and then keep searching!

NOTE: Encourage the children to “pinch the play dough” with their index fingers and thumbs.

Variations:

- Hide different coloured chips and the children have to put it in the matching colour container.
- Write letters on the “chips” and have the child match letter, identify letters or search just for the letters of their name. (You can use numbers too!)

Little Hand Mixers

Children love to help in the kitchen, and here’s a way they can and strengthen their hands at the same time!

You will need: muffin mix and ingredients, large resealable plastic bag and a muffin pan. Lay out all the ingredients onto the table. Follow the directions on the package putting all the ingredients into the plastic bag. Seal the bag really well once all the ingredients are in. Push, poke and mix the ingredients, around in the bag. Empty the mixture into a muffin pan and bake.

Clip-Ons

This activity uses a variety of clips such as: butterfly, hair clips, and clothes pins. Play Clip-Ons in pairs (one child and a parent). To start the child closes their eyes and the parent randomly places the clips on their child’s clothing. After all of the clips are on, the first child feels around their clothes, finds the clips, and removes them before opening their eyes. Make sure you take turns so the parent will have their eyes closed and the child puts the clips on.

Rub A Dub

Fill the tub/water table with warm water. Put doll clothes and washcloths in a bucket and clothespins in a small container. Hang a clothesline close by with a beach towel underneath to catch the dripping water. Have the children wash the items, getting them very wet. Tell them to squeeze and wring out the items until most of the water is

removed. Allow the children to rewash and wring out as often as they would like. Then the children can clip the items to the clothesline to finish drying.

****Using a clothes line to hand art work to dry is also a great way to get the children to use the clothes pins to strengthen their hands!****

Turkey Baster Blasters

This is a fun water activity where you will need turkey basters, a small plastic swimming pool (or water table), and small margarine tubs. Fill the swimming pool with water. Float the margarine tubs in the pool. Give each child a turkey baster (found at the dollar store) and have them lie down next to the pool. Each child fills his baster with water from the pool and then squirts it into one of the floating containers. Continue until the containers are full and have sunk. Dump the water back into the swimming pool and play again.

Cotton Ball Road Rally

Things you will need to play: masking tape, scooter boards, several containers, cotton balls or ping pong balls, plastic squeeze containers or turkey basters.

Tape a straight line on the floor to make a road. Put the balls in a container. Set the containers, squeeze bottles, and scooter boards near the tape. Let each child get on a scooter board and take a cotton ball and a squeeze bottle. Have him put his ball on the road and drive it along by blowing it with the squeeze bottle. The children can do this activity in a variety of positions: sitting on the scooter board, lying on the scooter board or lying on the floor.

Variations: Zig-Zag Drive: As the children become proficient at this activity, change the line to an 'S' curve or zig-zag line, add tunnels, etc.

Cotton Ball Pick-Up

Cotton Ball Pick-Up is a fun game of matching while working on hand strength. To play you will need coloured cotton balls, coloured markers, coloured stickers, or construction paper to match each cotton ball, spring loaded clothespins and empty margarine containers. Colour cod the margarine tubs with the markers, stickers or construction paper. Have the children help you scatter cotton balls on the floor, table or in your water table. Have the margarine tubs near by. Give each child a clothespin. Using the clothespin, each child should pick up a cotton ball and bring it to the matching margarine container. Another way to play is to give each child a container and he has to hunt for all the cotton balls that match his container.

****NOTE:** Encourage the children to use only their thumb and first two fingers to open and close the clothespins.

Variation: Instead of matching colours, match letters, numbers, shapes, etc.

Alien Clothespins

Alien clothespins is a similar game to cotton ball pick up. You will need coffee cans (or containers), coloured construction paper, scooter boards, and matching coloured clothespins. Cut out spaceships from different coloured construction paper and glue one to each coffee can. Draw an alien face on each clothespin. Have the aliens, space ships, and scooters available. In an open area, have the children scatter the Alien clothespins on the floor and set the space ships away from them. Have the children ride their scooter

boards, pick up the Aliens, and return them one at a time to their matching colour space ship. Clip each alien to the top rim of the space ship can.

****NOTE:** Encourage the children to use their thumbs and first two fingers to open the clothespins. Do this activity in a variety of positions, such as lying, or sitting on the scooter board.

Variations: Have children catch shapes, letters, numbers, etc. and clip them to the space ships.

Fluttering Butterflies

To create a fluttering butterfly you will need: 3 clothespins, a circle (5-7" in diameter) cut out of white paper, markers, pipe cleaners or 2 matching thin strips of construction paper, glue.

Have the child colour the circle in any desired pattern, then accordion fold it 3 times, attempting to make 4 fairly equal segments. It is not important that the child's folds be straight or equally spaced, only that he or she makes creases in the paper. Pinch together the 2 center segments on the middle fold, to make the butterfly's body. Hold them together while the child attaches clothespins sticking down from the body to represent legs. (One clothespin in the front and one in the back will be sufficient to allow the butterfly to stand, or the child can attach 3 to represent the 6 legs an insect has.) The child can glue on pipe-cleaner antennae (or use paper strips) and draw eyes on the butterfly, if desired.

Make sure if your child is struggling with the folds you model or provide some physical assistance if required.

Clay (or Play Dough) and Toothpicks (or pieces of straws)

You can use clay or play dough to complete this activity. Have child soften clay by squeezing it and rolling it between their hands and then form tiny balls. To create tiny balls roll clay between thumb and 1st and 2nd fingers, keeping the last two fingers curled into palm. Join toothpicks using the balls of clay. Form letters, numbers, and shapes. The clay will form the corner joints of the structures.

If the child has difficulty keeping their last two fingers curled into palm, have them hold a small pom pom against their palm with the last two fingers.

Finger Statues

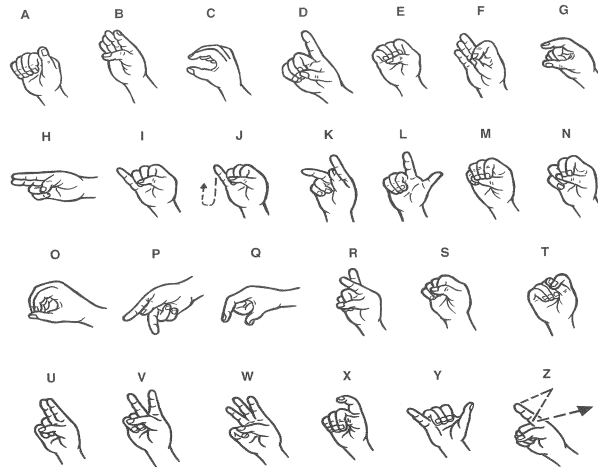
All you need is your fingers to play. Start with all players putting their hands behind their backs. Adult or leader shapes fingers into a pose (for example, close hands into a fist and straighten up only the thumbs and index fingers of both hands, or use sign language alphabet). The leader shows this pose to the other players. The other players put their hands into the pose they are being shown and the bring hand to front.

Variations:

1. Choose finger poses that are easier to imitate.
2. Bring one hand out in front to copy the pose while the other stays behind the back and tries to copy it.
3. Have the student imitate the pose with both hands in front of the body.

Sign Language Alphabet

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Finger Soccer

To start create a soccer field on a 11" X 17" piece of construction paper. Your soccer ball will be a cotton ball. The object of the game is to shoot the cotton ball off the paper at the opponent's end. The two players lay on the floor propped on their elbows, with the paper field between them. One player shoots the cotton ball by flicking it with his index finger keeping other fingers tucked into palm. The second student tries to catch the cotton ball when it crosses the middle line. If not, the first student gets to flick the cotton ball again. Then switch and have second student flick the cotton ball while the first student catches.

Straw Wars

Have the children partnered up and each pair should have a coffee stirrer or popsicle stick. The two players lie on the floor on their stomachs, facing each other. Hold one straw between the two of you, holding it between your index finger and thumb. Keep your elbow on the floor, and try to keep our wrist from moving. Count to three and pull...but only use your fingers!

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