

Establishing Hand Dominance

Why is it important that children establish a dominant hand?

Children need to establish a dominant hand in order to complete more complex activities, such as writing. The non-dominant hand still has an important role in bimanual coordination tasks as the “helper hand”; for example, the “helper hand” will stabilize the paper while the dominant hand prints.

How does handedness develop?

Genetics plays a role in children’s hand dominance, as do the child’s coordination skills.

When will I know if they are left handed or right handed?

Hand dominance starts to develop between two to three years of age, and typically is completed by six years of age.

It is normal for children to switch hands?

It is normal for children to switch hands during play up until the age of 3 years. At that point you may notice the child switch hand preference from one activity to another but they should not be switching hands during a given activity; for example, they may always colour with their right hand and always cut with their left hand. Children need to use both of their hands early on in life so they can develop the strength and dexterity in each hand.

If you notice that a child uses one hand much more than the other by the age of two, this may be an indication that there is a neurological concern. Watch to see if the child uses one hand for all tasks and the helper hand helps very little.

Should I encourage a child to use one hand?

The only time you should be encouraging one hand use over the other is if the child is older than six years of age and is switching hands during a given activity. For example if he is switching hands during writing and it is clear his right hand is more skilled at this task, his right hand should be encouraged to use the pencil while the left should be encouraged to hold the paper.

References

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