

Month 6: Developing Functional Hand Skills Toddler Activities

Green Thumb

Materials:

- Large plastic cup
- Handful of small stones
- Dirt
- Seeds (marigold or bean seeds grow easily)
- Small hand shovel
- Small cup of water

Have your child place a layer of stones in the bottom of the cup. Encourage her to pick up the stones using her thumb and index finger. Help your child use the shovel to scoop dirt into the cup, filling it to 1 inch from the top. Have the child poke a hole into the dirt in the centre of the cup with her index finger. Have her put one of two seeds into the hole, using her thumb and index finger. Help the child scoop more dirt into the cup, filling it to ½ inch from the top. Show her how to pat the dirt to pack it. Help your child pour enough water to moisten the soil. Set the plant in the window. Continue to water the seed and watch the plant grow.

Potato Porcupine

In order to make a potato porcupine you will need a potato and some toothpicks. To start demonstrate to your child how to make the quills of the pretend porcupine by sticking the toothpicks into the potato. Encourage your child to hold the potato still on the table surface with one hand and push a quill into the porcupine with the other hand, using the pads of the index finger and thumb. Don't forget to get creative by adding eyes, nose and a mouth with other foods or items.

To make this activity easier: Make the potato softer, peel it or put it in the microwave for a few minutes.

To make this activity harder: Use a variety of vegetables or fruit for different amounts of resistance. Squash, cucumber, pear or kiwi will work.

Gel Writing

In order to make your child their own gel writing pad you will need coloured hair gel (such as Dippity-Do brand) and a self-sealing (Ziploc) plastic bag. If the gel isn't dark enough add some food colouring. Place the gel into the plastic bag. Have your child help you with this step, either squeezing the tube of gel or using a spoon to scoop the gel from the jar to the bag. Make sure not to fill the bag too much and once there is enough seal the bag, in order to avoid any accidents or spills you may want to double bag the gel.

Now you're ready to write in gel. Lay the gel bag flat and using your index finger like a pencil, model simple impressions in the gel such as dots, simple lines or shapes. Encourage your child to hold all other fingers in a fist while using just the index finger to write. It may help if they hold something small in their hand. Erase the image by gently patting on the surface. Encourage the child to imitate your impressions.

Thumbuddies In Ink

To make Thumbuddies you will need non-toxic inkpads, paper and markers. Demonstrate how to make fingerprints, one at a time, by straightening each finger and pressing the pad into the inkpad and then onto the paper. Encourage the child to use all fingers to decorate his paper with fingerprints. Make sure your child tucks the remaining fingers into his palm. Invite the child to use a marker to attach arms and legs to each fingerprint. To add challenge to the activity tape the paper to the wall.

Snip-It Designs

This activity is very similar to the tear-it-up designs explained above. Provide your child with ½" strips of paper (the stiffer the paper the easier the activity, so you may want to start with cardstock and progress to construction paper). Instruct your child to hold the strip with one hand and use the scissors with a thumbs up pattern with the other hand. Have your child to target the strip and snip numerous times to make small pieces. Glue the cut pieces of paper onto a paper to create a design. Or have your child fill in a template to create a design. If your child has difficulty with snipping paper have her snip straws and par-cooked pasta noodles, they are easier to handle in order to be success in snipping.

*See attached templates of a mitt and snowflake to fill with the snipped paper.

Make a Straw Necklace

In order to make a straw necklace you will need, coloured plastic straws, scissors and wool or thread. Have your child hold the scissors with one hand and the straw with the other (if he needs help holding the straw that's o.k. just make sure you are placing the non-cutting hand on the straw so he can get used to the pattern). Allow him to cut the straw into pieces. Once cut thread the straw pieces onto the wool that was previously cut to the proper size. After the straw pieces have been threaded tie the ends of the wool together and you will have a straw necklace ready to wear.

Stencil Fingerpainting

Fingerpainting is always fun! Before you start cut 8-10 stencils out of coffee can lids or Styrofoam meat trays. Let the child choose the stencil they would like and tape it to construction paper. Then let her spoon a small amount of fingerpaint into the middle of the stencil and using her finger to spread it around until the whole area inside is covered. Encourage her to use only one finger to spread the fingerpaint and the opposite hand to hold the stencil.

Variations:

- Stencil Murals: Cover the table with craft paper or butcher paper and stencil all over it.

Stay On The Glue Road

Using poster board and a bottle of glue construct some glue roads. To make each road, slowly drizzle a single continuous line of glue (craft or glue gun) from one edge of the poster board to the other. Be certain to include curves and zig-zags. Put the board with the variety of roads on the table or floor. Let the children pretend that their fingers are cars. Drive the cars along the different roads. Encourage the child to use only their index finger as the car. You can also have the children drive small vehicles on the roads. Add houses, stop signs, etc. for dramatic play.

Kooky Cut-Ups

Put several different materials in a shoe box (yarn, twine, straws, cardboard, Styrofoam meat trays, packing peanuts, waxed paper, etc.) and give your child a pair of scissors and the same number of small boxes as materials or a collage box. Let the children cut the materials into small pieces and put them into the collage box (or sort each material into their own container). Use these materials for gluing and pasting activities.

Sticky Fingers

To play sticky fingers you will need bingo chips, child-sized gloves and self-adhesive Velcro dots. Adhere a Velcro dot to each chip and to the fingertips of each glove. Lay the chips on the table, Velcro side up. Have the child put the glove on one hand. Let him pick up chips by touching the Velcro on his fingers to that on the chips keeping his fingers apart. After a child has filled his glove with chips he can remove them and put them back on the table. Allow him to repeat, using the same or opposite hand.

Colour-In

Choose a simple shape or picture and outline it with a glue line at least ¼' thick is best. Allow the glue to dry to form a raised border. Once dry place the paper in front of the child with crayons. Show the border to the child and allow them to feel it before beginning to colour. Say to the child, "Colour on the paper and stay inside the raised border." The raised borders keep the child from colouring off the page and increase her awareness of the boundaries of the paper. Encourage her to use one hand to colour and the other to hold the paper.

Newspaper Crumple

Using newspaper and a basket you are ready for a game of Newspaper Crumple. Take a sheet of newspaper and tear it into strips about 2 inches wide, or start the strip and allow your toddler to finish tearing the length of the paper. Then have your child crumple the paper into balls and then throw to the basket!

Q-Tip Flips

Using paint and Q-Tips its time to create. Hold the Q-Tip in the middle with a tripod grasp (thumb, index and middle fingers). Dip it in one colour paint. Using only the thumb, index and middle fingers, flip the Q-Tip over and dip it in another colour paint. Now paint a picture, letter, or design with coloured dots, alternating between the two colours. Be sure the student is flipping the Q-Tip with fingers, not wrist. Keep checking to make sure the student is using a tripod grasp.

Sticker Pictures

Make a picture using stickers! Have fun! Use the index finger and thumb to take the stickers off the backing paper. Try to encourage the child use the other hand to stabilize.

Straw Cut & String

Cut straws into inch-long pieces, using proper scissor grasp. Now it's time to string the straw pieces. Using two fingers to hold the straw pieces and the other hand to hold the string (or pipecleaner). Push the string through the straw. Continue pushing it through but never letting go, until the straw piece is at the end of the string. Make a bracelet by knotting the two ends together once the straw pieces have been strung.

Popcorn Sheep

All you need is some popcorn and glue and your toddler is ready to make a sheep. Draw a picture (or use a colouring page template) of a sheep. Uses popcorn have them glue inside the sheep to create.

Blackboard Masterpiece

You can skip the chalk and eraser for this instant chalkboard activity. All your child needs is a paintbrush and a cup of water to create dark swirls in the residual chalk dust. Remember to try and have your toddler imitate your lines (vertical, horizontal and circles).

More Water Painting

Give your child that same paintbrush and water, then let her create a temporary work of art on dark construction paper. Or head outside and have her paint on the sidewalk, house, fence, etc.

Ephemeral Ice Drawing

Here's a very cool project for a hot day. Supply your child with several sheets of coloured paper and an ice cube to draw with. As the ice cube melts, it will create a trail of dark marks that fade as they dry and then – poof!- disappear completely. For an easy to hold twist you can make the ice in a plastic ice pop mold with a handle.

Papier Mâché Bowls

This cute craft introduces toddlers to papier-mâché, and she'll love the process of goopy hands transforming tissue paper into a colourful little container that will delight your little artist. To create this bowl you will need: 2 small bowls, cooking spray, plastic wrap, ¼ cup of flour, ½ cup of water, paintbrush, 2 sheets of tissue paper cut or torn into roughly 2" x 2" pieces, and a bowl of vinegar (optional). To prep for the creation your child can help by cutting or tearing the strips of tissue paper into squares.

Instructions:

1. Coat the outside of one small bowl with cooking spray, then cover it tightly with plastic wrap.
2. In the other bowl, whisk the flour and water together until smooth (remember this is for the kids so let them pour ingredients and stir).

3. Have your child brush the paste onto the plastic wrap, then cover it with pieces of tissue paper. She may need your help pressing down the pieces so that they stick to the paste. When the bowl is covered with one layer, have her brush on more paste and add another layer. Continue until you have a thick, defined bowl shape; you'll need at least five layers. If the brush gets too goopy dip it in white vinegar, then rinse it with water. Let the papier-mâché dry (at least 12 hours).
4. Gently remove the papier-mâché bowl from the bowl mold and peel the plastic wrap away. For a smooth edge, trim the bowl's rim with scissors.

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