

Preschoolers develop their hand skills by playing and using their hands to do everyday activities such as getting dressed. Medical conditions can affect how your child uses her hands.

How do preschool aged children typically use their hands?

Preschoolers are starting to use their hands in a skillful and coordinated way. They generally show a hand preference however it is common for children to still swap hands. They tend to use one hand for the skilled part of an activity and the other hand as the assisting hand. For example when cutting with scissors the preferred hand holds and uses the scissors whilst the other hand holds the paper. At this age children are developing more control when using tools such as a pencil, scissors, a spoon or fork. They are also learning to get dressed by themselves, draw, colour and cut out.



Helpful strategies

- ▶ Have fun playing with your child and encourage her to use her arms and hands. Through play activities your child will develop and practice her hand skills. If your child tends to use only one hand, try activities that require two hands such as riding a bike or threading beads.
- ▶ Help your child use her hands by showing her how and if necessary guide her. For example, demonstrate how to cut with scissors. Help her to hold the scissors with her preferred hand with her thumb on top and hold the paper with her assisting hand with her thumb on top.
- ▶ Encourage your child to use both her hands at every opportunity.
- ▶ Reward your child whenever she tries to use both hands. Tell her what a good job she is doing; clap and cheer her efforts; give her a hug, a sticker, or a treat.



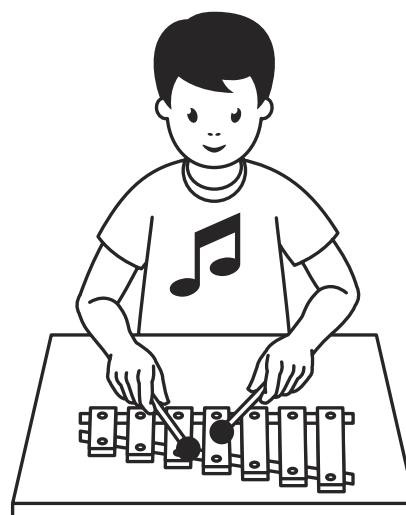
Please contact your occupational therapist if you have any queries about the above information.

Indoor activities

Encourage your child to do these activities using both hands.

Some of these activities will require supervision.

- ▶ Playdough – roll, squash, mould, use a rolling pin, cutters, a garlic press, or plastic knife.
- ▶ Threading activities such as beads or lacing cards.
- ▶ Build with Duplo, Lego and other construction toys.
- ▶ Cooking activities – mixing, measuring, sifting, kneading, rolling or using cookie cutters.
- ▶ Draw with textas – taking lids on/off.
- ▶ Cut with a pair of children's scissors.
- ▶ Art and craft activities such as making cards, a hat, or book. Use stickers, scissors, sticky tape or glue sticks, pipe cleaners, paper and cardboard.
- ▶ Make things using old boxes, egg cartons, lids, wrapping paper, wool, and masking or sticky tape.
- ▶ Tear up coloured paper for pasting or collage activities.
- ▶ Musical instruments – drums, shakers, xylophone, mouth organ, guitar, keyboard or piano.
- ▶ Take lids on and off jars that are filled with fun objects such as stickers, lollies, small plastic bugs or animals.
- ▶ Arm and finger games such as 'Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes', 'Incy Wincy Spider', 'The Wheels On The Bus', 'Simon Says'.
- ▶ Imaginary play using a tea-set, teddies, dolls, a cash register, telephone, dress ups, tool kit, medical kit, large cardboard boxes or a cubby-house.
- ▶ Hand and finger puppets.
- ▶ Dressing dolls or teddies.
- ▶ Read books together. Encourage your child to hold the book, turn the pages and point to the pictures.
- ▶ Deal cards when playing card games such as Snap, Fish, or Uno.



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Outdoor activities

Encourage your child to do these activities using both hands.

Some of these activities will require supervision.

- ▶ Sand play – dig, pour, mix, build castles or drive cars.
- ▶ Water play – fill up a shallow container with water. Pour water into cups, add toy animals, ice-blocks or a few drops of food colouring. Alternatively, use a sponge to wash a doll or clean a bike.
- ▶ Swimming.
- ▶ Playground – climb a ladder or climbing frame, swing on a swing, have fun on a seesaw.
- ▶ Ball games – use a basket ball or soccer ball to throw, catch, bounce, or aim at a target.
- ▶ Bat and ball games, such as cricket, golf, and tennis.
- ▶ Hammer with nails and wood.
- ▶ Ride a tricycle, bike or scooter.
- ▶ Hold a container of bubble mixture and blow bubbles.
- ▶ Finger painting with both hands using finger-paint or shaving cream.
- ▶ Help in the garden – water with a hose, sweep pathways or rake up leaves.
- ▶ Water plants with a spray bottle.
- ▶ Skittles – roll the ball with both hands.
- ▶ Hit a suspended ball or balloon with a rolling pin or bat that is held with both hands.

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Everyday activities

Encourage your child to do these activities using both hands.

Some of these activities will require supervision.

- ▶ Encourage your child to get dressed and undressed by himself. This includes using both hands to pull up his pants and put on his socks.
- ▶ Do up buttons on pyjamas and clothes.
- ▶ Do up zips on pencil cases, bags or clothes.
- ▶ During bath-time encourage your child to wash himself or a toy with a face washer or sponge. Have fun pouring water into containers or funnels, make a cake with a bowl and spoon, or wind-up bath toys.
- ▶ Open drink bottles and lunch boxes.
- ▶ Peel a banana or mandarin.
- ▶ Hold and eat a small box of sultanas.
- ▶ Open the toothpaste and squeeze the toothpaste onto the brush.
- ▶ Help around the house – put clothes into the dirty washing basket, pick up toys and put them into the toy box, carry dishes from the table to the sink.
- ▶ Help with the shopping – carry unbreakable items (such as toilet paper), put items into the trolley.

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