

# Developing hand dominance

## Why is having a dominant hand important?

- Having a dominant, or preferred, hand allows us to develop great accuracy and speed with fine motor tasks including handwriting, cutting, brushing our teeth, and using cutlery.
- Hand dominance means we have a highly effective hand with which to perform tasks (our “doing” hand), and a hand to assist (our “helping” hand).
- If children don’t develop a dominant hand, it is difficult for either hand to get enough practice to become highly skilled. They are likely to have two hands with average skills, which can make overall fine motor skills less efficient.
- Typically, a preference can start to be observed between 2 and 4 years, with a clear dominance generally established between 4 and 6 years.



## Identifying which hand is dominant

- It can be difficult at times to identify a child’s dominant hand when they don’t display a clear preference.
- It is important not to try to force a child to use a particular hand.
- Instead, carefully observe your child doing everyday activities (drawing, writing, cutting, pasting, brushing teeth and hair, eating and drinking, playing with toys) and take note of:
  - Whether one hand is used more than the other
  - Whether one hand seems more skilled than the other
- Position toys, pencils, crayons etc in front of your child in the centre, rather than handing them to one hand, or placing to one side. Take note of which hand they generally choose to pick up the objects.





## Encouraging use of the dominant hand

- Once it is clear which hand is preferred or more skilled, encourage your child to use this hand consistently for fine motor activities
- Talk to your child about this hand being their “doing” hand and the other hand being their “helping” hand
- Give lots of feedback and encouragement (eg. “Look how neatly your doing hand drew that circle”)
- Encourage your child to finish an activity with the hand they started with. Take a break if they become tired, rather than swapping hands.

## Activities to develop hand skills

### Fine motor activities to try

- Encourage your child to participate in a wide range of play and everyday activities to practice using their “doing” and “helper” hands. Here are some ideas to try:
  - Drawing, colouring and writing
  - Cutting and pasting
  - Arts and crafts, like painting, stamps, stencils, tracing
  - Building with Lego or blocks
  - Playing board and card games
  - Puzzles
  - Musical instruments
  - Threading or lacing activities
  - Peeling off stickers
  - Games with tongs, tweezers or clothes pegs
  - Scooping sand, rice or pasta between containers

### Self-care activities to practice

- Brushing teeth and hair
- Using cutlery rather than fingers to eat
- Pouring water between containers in the bath and practising washing themselves
- Opening drink bottles, containers, and lunch boxes
- Practicing buttons, zips, and tying shoelaces
- Cooking activities - measuring, stirring, pouring





## Gross motor activities to try

- Digging in a sand pit, building castles and driving cars or trucks in the sand
- Gardening - digging, watering plants
- Throwing balls or beanbags into a bucket or at a target
- Bowling games
- Balloon games
- Bat and ball games like tennis and cricket
- Hammering
- Playing games like Simon Says

Images: Unsplash and Pexels



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