

Hands-On Dominance Information for Teachers and Parents

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The establishment of hand dominance is a complex brain process. Predominant and proficient use of one hand over the other for handwriting, feeding, and performing other functional activities in daily life usually emerges in a young child between 4.5 and 6 years of age. Up to 90% of the population is right-hand dominant and 10% is left- or mixed-hand dominant. Encouraging or forcing the use of a particular hand in functional activities such as handwriting may actually lead to stuttering, stammering, and increased levels of stress within young children (Meng, 2007), not to mention inefficient hand use. Research supports us in our effort to honor the natural development of handedness in each young child as we guide him/her in the hand, head, and heart toward handwriting. Observing the emergence of hand dominance or any other aspect of child development is a gift to the teacher or parent. So, don't worry when a young child is switching hands when coloring - instead realize that you are watching that child's brain working through his/her hands to determine hand dominance for a lifetime!

While it may be tempting to help a young child "decide" which hand will be the dominant mover and which hand will be the non-dominant stabilizer, research recommends a facilitative role for teachers and parents. We must encourage children's use of hands in play and daily activities where two hands are performing different jobs in order to develop hand dominance. Presenting toys and other items at the midline (belly button level) allows young children to use the preferred hand to grasp and use the object spontaneously, which reinforces hand dominance.

Educators and parents can help facilitate establishment of hand dominance in young children by presenting one-handed activities or implements at the midline (belly button level) to encourage spontaneous grasping with the preferred hand. One particular activity children love is finding a bead or button that is hidden in putty using only one hand.

Reference:

Meng, L. (2007). The rate of handedness conversion and related factors in left-handed children. *Laterality*, 12(2), 131-138.

Please visit www.writeoutofthebox.com for more information about how to develop fine motor skills in young children.