

Cook-Up Fun Kitchen Projects and Serve Up Strong Handwriting Skills

Katherine Collmer, M.Ed., OTR/L

Building your toddler's handwriting skills begins at home - in your kitchen! Projects that provide a child with opportunities to squeeze, mash, roll and pinch will set the stage for strong hands, wrists and arms. Try some of these simple ways to partner with your child in the kitchen and give a boost to handwriting success!

1. **Rolling, Rolling, Rolling.** I found three easy recipes for play dough on www.kiddinaround.com. Making it together is a great experience in itself! To build upper body strength, cook up a big batch and clear the kitchen table! Bring out the adult rolling pins and let your child roll until the dough is spread as far as the table is wide! (To be sure that she is using her shoulders too, have her kneel on a chair to raise her up.)
2. **Cutting Up.** Don't put away that play dough yet. Get out the cookie cutters and create as many play dough cookies as you can! For extra resistance, fold some of the play dough back over itself to make it thicker.
3. **A Pinch To Grow An Inch.** Now wait, you aren't getting ready to stow the dough, are you? Before you do that, have your child pinch each "cookie" off the table with her dominant hand. If she hasn't identified one yet, go ahead and use both.
4. **Hide and Seek.** Grab a deep plastic container and fill it half way with rice, beans or both. Hide small pieces of crayon in the mixture and have your child search for them. When he finds one, have him use it to color in a portion of a coloring book picture that you have taped to the wall. This will combine finger strengthening with shoulder and arm strengthening.
5. **Pop Goes The Weasel.** Take a shallow plastic container, add a small amount of shampoo or bubble bath and mix it with warm water. Add a straw and blow into the mixture to create bubbles. (You should do this if your child is not able to refrain from sucking in!) Have your child use her thumb and first two fingers of her dominant hand (both if not identified yet) to pop the bubbles. Add food coloring to make a rainbow.
6. **Stir It Up.** Take out a large saucepan and fill it with your rice or beans. Hand your child a wooden spoon and let him make a stir! This provides shoulder and upper arm strengthening. Scooping them out and filling bowls adds more complex wrist and finger strengthening.
7. **Music To My Ears.** Clear the kitchen table and pull out plastic containers and glasses, wooden spoons and some small pans. (You might want to protect the table with a tablecloth or use the floor instead.) Sing a song and have your child "play" the tune on the kitchen instruments. Excellent eye-hand coordination and arm strengthening activity.
8. **Mighty Muscles.** Every child loves to explore the pantry. Put that curiosity to use by creating arm exercises with small cans of veggies or tomato sauce. Place the cans on the table and demonstrate a silly arm movement using the can. Have your child imitate that movement as she brings the can back to the pantry to store. This could be performed to music and the path to the pantry could be extended by traveling through other rooms first. Great upper body work!
9. **What's That?** Begin this activity by joining your child in a treasure hunt. Locate about 10 small kitchen items (e.g., measuring spoon, bottle top, plastic fork, tiny whisk). Set them on the table and talk about them, using simple names your child can remember. Place them all (or you can start with a few) in a large paper bag. Have him reach in and grab one...but don't take it out! Let him manipulate it with his hand and describe it to you...even if he knows what it is. Giving him a chance to visualize it and describe its texture, size and shape offers him an opportunity to build visual memory skills needed for handwriting.
10. **Did You See My...?** Visual scanning is an integral part of the mastery of handwriting skills. The kitchen is loaded with gadgets, small appliances and widgets. Have your child stand in one spot for this activity, preferably in the middle of the kitchen. Using the phrase, "Did you see my..." ask her to locate an item in the kitchen. For example, "Did you see my can opener?" Have her stay "planted" and try to use her eyes to find the object. Of course, she can turn around to look behind her!

I hope that some of these activities find your way into your kitchen! And Please remember: Handwriting is FUN! Visit me at <http://www.handwritingwithkatherine.com/resources.html> for more great handwriting resources.