

Activities to Encourage Hand Dominance

Any activity that encourages the different movements of each hand will encourage the development of hand dominance. These activities should be repeated over time to provide practice and to help the child develop his or her skills sufficiently to develop an awareness of which hand is more skilled. These activities make the child decide on which hand to use to do the activity and which hand assists or holds.

1. **Screwing lids on and off jars**, screwing pipe fittings together, assembling nuts and bolts. To add interest to screwing lids off, hide small objects or stickers inside for the child to "discover".
2. **Large legos (Duplos)** or other building type toys - one hand must hold and the other manipulates the piece into position.
3. **Pushing a car or train around a track.** You can draw a pathway or "streets" on a long piece of paper. This works wonderfully, because as the child moves the car, he ends up crawling and naturally stabilizing his weight on the non-dominant hand.
4. **Tool use such as hammering or using a screwdriver.** Children's toy workbenches are great and safe way for children to practice their manipulative skills.
5. **Household tools** such as tongs, large tweezers, a strawberry huller or clothes pin to pick up objects. A kitchen tool called a pickle fork to pick up pom poms works beautifully to force that decision on which hand to use and children love playing with it!!
6. **Scooping** beans, salt, or noodles with a spoon into containers. Try both hands, watching to see which one is more skilled.
7. **"Pick-up games"** Use pennies, buttons, beans, skewers cut into one inch lengths or other small items which require use of a refined pincer grasp (ie. holding the item between the pad of the index finger and pad of the thumb). Then try putting the items into a small hole or slot cut in the lid of a yogurt container. Alternate hands doing the task and watch the quality of movement.
8. **Encourage coloring on small pieces of paper.** One hand has to stabilize the paper or it slips all around.
9. **Ball Play** Try to provide opportunities for the child to practice his/her ball skills. Try rolling balls, catching, tossing balls into a container. Be sure to start with a ball large enough that the child feels comfortable with and moving smaller as his/her skills progress. You may also try these activities with beanbags. In using large balls, children learn to use their hands symmetrically, working together. Smaller balls will elicit more of one hand emerging as the dominant one. Positioning the container higher up in relation to the child helps to encourage extension of the wrist with pronation (palms down position) of the hand.
10. **Lacing cards:** hand sewing encourages the use of a dominant hand. Lacing cards can be made of thin cardboard with a hole punch. Use long shoelaces, or yarn with the end stiffened with tape or blunt tapestry needles and yarn. Burlap can also be stitched without punching holes.

11. **Bowling.** Go to an alley or set up some objects to knock over at home with a ball in a safe place.
12. **Play Dough:** Let the child to play with cookie cutters with clay. Also encourage the child pound on the clay with one hand to flatten it.
13. **Zip Lock Bags:** Store small play objects in zip lock bags. The child must decide on a hand to hold the bag and which hand to use to put the items away with.
14. **Tracing over templates** is a good activity. One hand traces and the other must stabilize the template.
15. **Stickers in a sticker book:** Taking stickers off of the sheet can be very challenging for some children. Start with larger stickers, moving to smaller ones as the child develops his skill in removing stickers.

Desired Skill:

The child is using one hand in a more skilled manner with the other hand assisting.

Undesired Response:

The child should not use both hands equally to perform tasks better done by using one hand to manipulate and the other hand to hold. Also undesired, is having the child alternating hands, so the precise hand control of a dominant hand never develops. Avoid this by having the child stay using the hand he or she starts with. Teach the child to rest the hand if needed. Encourage the child to do the above activities, which force a decision on the child's part, as to which hand to use.

Watch For:

When working with the child, watch the quality of manipulation done with both hands. With each activity, watch to see which hand is more effective in manipulating the objects. To do this, you may occasionally ask the child, to switch hands to see the quality and speed of movement of each hand. The dominant hand will be smoother in movement and is generally faster. Occasionally, ask the child which hand "feels better." In time, both you and the child will have an idea of which hand is the preferred hand.

Watch, which hand initiates common activities such as: brushing teeth, brushing or combing hair, door opening, counting items and pointing to objects. Often children will start fine motor activities with their dominant hand and then switch to the non-dominant hand, as the dominant hand fatigues. It is better to teach the child to stop and rest his/her hand rather than switching.

Occasionally, hand dominance is slow to develop due to other factors. If after trying these activities, you continue to have concerns, please consult with a Pediatric Occupational Therapist.