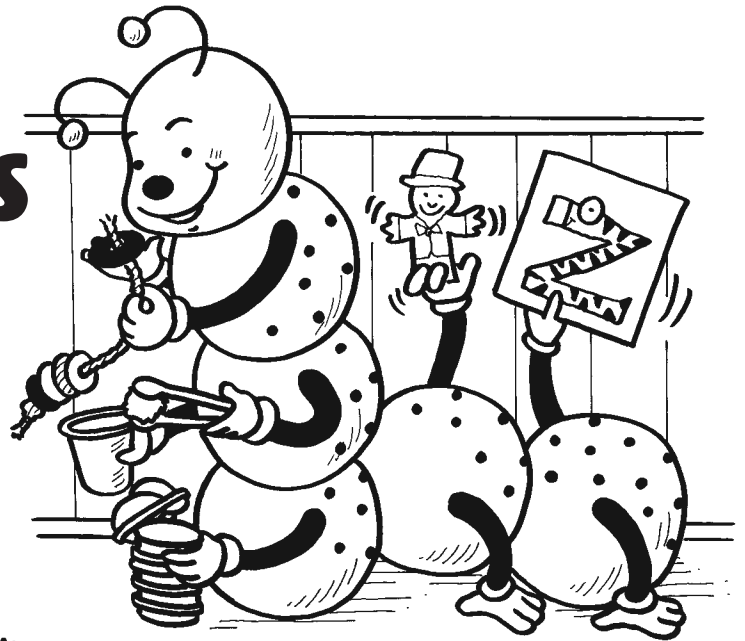


Fine-Motor Fun & Games

Doodle, draw, snip, snap, print! Little fingers need to be strong and coordinated to accomplish all the jobs they do. Here are activities and games designed to get your youngster's muscles ready for writing and other fine-motor tasks.



Shoelace jewelry

Your child can design colorful bracelets, necklaces, and more to practice grasping and manipulating tiny objects.



First, make a knot in one end of a shoelace. Next, let your youngster slide beads or colored cereal rings onto the shoelace in a pattern. *Example:* Red, yellow, purple, red, yellow, purple. When she's finished, tie the ends of the shoelace together. She could wear her jewelry—or give it to someone else as a gift!

Greedy gators

Whose alligator will grab the most cotton balls? This fast-paced game uses tweezers to strengthen your child's fingers. Each player needs an "alligator" (tweezers or tongs), a cup containing a dozen cotton balls or pompoms, and an empty cup. On the count of 3, everyone races to transfer their cotton balls to their empty cup, one at a time, using only their "gators." If you drop a cotton ball, your alligator must retrieve it. The first player to transfer all of his cotton balls wins. *Idea:* Once your youngster has mastered the game, replace the cotton with objects that aren't so squishy and easy to grasp, such as coins or buttons.

Tin-can wrap

Combine a finger workout with counting. Close your eyes while your child wraps several rubber bands around a soup can. She should bunch and overlap them to disguise how many she used. Then, you estimate how many bands are on the can. Have her check your estimate by rolling them off the can and counting them. Now you wrap rubber bands around the can, and let her estimate, unwrap, and count.

Hair salon

Your youngster will get experience using scissors as he gives haircuts to these cardboard critters. Ask him to draw funny faces on the bottom halves of several toilet-tissue tubes. He might choose to make each tube a different animal, monster, or person. Then, you cut the top half of each tube into narrow strips to make "hair." Your child can use safety scissors and his imagination to cut and style each creature's hair.



continued



Clay storybook characters

Sculpting with play dough works every muscle in your child's hands. For this guessing game, each of you secretly chooses a book character to sculpt. Demonstrate how to roll dough between your palms to make a ball for a head or "snakes" to create limbs. Adding craft supplies will give your little one's fine-motor skills an extra boost. For example, he might press wiggly eyes onto a beast from *Where the Wild Things Are* (Maurice Sendak). Now try to guess each other's characters. You may need to give clues ("Max saw this in his room").

"Stained glass" snowflakes

Let your youngster design beautiful paper snowflakes that sunlight will shine through. First, help her fold a piece of white construction paper in half. Show her how to cut shapes along the fold to make holes. Then, open the paper, fold it in half the opposite way, and she can cut holes along the new fold. Unfold the paper, and lay it flat. Now it's time to add the

"stained glass." Have her cut or tear small pieces of colored tissue paper or colored plastic wrap to glue over each hole. When the glue dries, hang the snowflake in a sunny window. She'll see the light shining through the *translucent* (sheer) material, showing different colors.

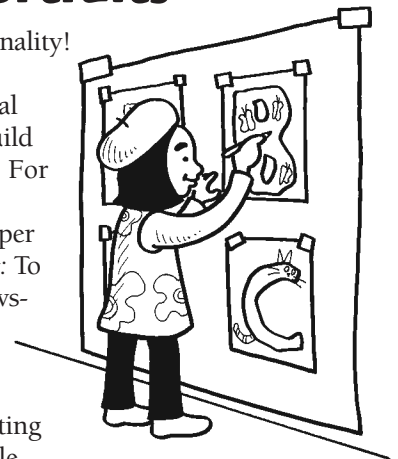
Finger puppets

Finger puppets encourage your child to move his fingers individually. Help him use safety scissors to cut 2" x 4" rectangles out of poster board or index cards. He can draw a creature (animal, dragon, unicorn) on each one, leaving blank spaces at the bottom for finger holes. Help him cut out his puppet, then cut two finger-sized holes. His fingers will become the creature's "legs." Now suggest that he act out a story for you, moving each puppet when it is "walking" or "talking."

Alphabet portraits

These letters have personality!

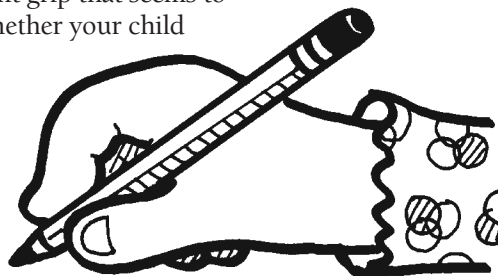
This cute mural lets your youngster paint on a vertical surface—a good way to build her arm and wrist muscles. For each letter of the alphabet, hang a separate sheet of paper on an easel or a wall. (Note: To protect a wall, hang up newspaper behind your child's paper.) She can paint a letter and draw clothing and decorate it with things starting with that letter. For example, A might wear an *apron* and hold an *apple*, and C could look like a *cat*. She should use a new piece of paper for each letter. After they dry, hang them on her bedroom wall.



Pencil grip tips

Holding a pencil comfortably from the very beginning makes learning to write much easier for your youngster. Try these tips to help her develop the traditional "tripod" pencil grip. Note: If she's already using a different grip that seems to be working, talk to her teacher about whether your child should make any adjustments.

- Let your youngster use broken crayons and stubby pencils for drawing and writing from time to time. The short length will make using three fingers instead of her whole hand feel more natural to her.



- Ask your child to form a circle with her thumb and forefinger. Next, she should separate her thumb and index finger slightly and place a pencil between them. Have her gently bend the rest of her fingers—she's ready to write.

- Writing is more efficient if your youngster keeps her pinky and ring finger curled up toward her palm. Help her get in this habit by giving her an eraser or another small object to hold between those two fingers and her palm while she writes.

Early Years