

Hand Skills: using two hands together

It is important for our two hands to be able to work together well. Many activities such as getting dressed, using tools, writing or cooking need our hands to work together.

Children take time to learn to use their two hands in a coordinated way. To begin with, most children learn to use both hands together to do the same action, for example, catching a large ball. Later they begin to have a helping and a leading hand, for example, holding paper and cutting with scissors or holding a jar and taking off the lid. Last of all, they manage activities where both hands are doing something different while working together, such as making a Meccano® model with small pieces.



You can help your child get better at using both hands together by giving them lots of practice activities, including play activities that you and your child enjoy.

Activities where both hands do the same thing

Outdoor activities:

- Use a beach ball to catch and throw.
- If your child is not ready to catch a ball, they can hold a bucket with two hands and move it to catch balls/beanbags.
- If you have a scooterboard, your child can lie on their tummy and hold onto a hoop or towel while you pull them along. Or they can push themselves along the floor with their hands. Remember that scooterboards need supervision for safe use.
- Play balloon volleyball or balloon tennis with your child, as they use both hands to pat the balloon into the air.
- Encourage your child to ride a tricycle, with both hands on the handlebars to steer.
- Push your child on a swing—make sure they are holding on with both hands!

Indoor activities:

Your child can:

- Use both hands together and make patterns in shaving cream or finger paints.
- Bang on a drum using two hands symmetrically.
- Play clapping games with you.

Activities of daily living:

- Get your child to be as independent as possible with simple dressing activities such as pulling up their pants.

Activities with one leading hand and one helping hand

Outdoor activities:

- Place a ball in an old stocking and suspend it. Encourage your child to hit it with a bat or cardboard tube held with both hands.
- Play mini-golf with your child. Use a plastic container for a hole.
- Take your child to the playground and supervise them climbing on play equipment.

Indoor activities:

Your child can:

- Draw with textas. Encourage your child to use their non-active hand to hold the paper when drawing, and to get the texta lids on/off.
- Play with toys that need two hands to operate, for example, a jack-in-the-box.
- Draw or trace figures of eight on a large board or piece of paper while holding the paper with the other hand.
- Drive a toy car using one hand to travel around the track and the other hand to lean on.
- Hold a bubble jar and use the bubble wand with the other hand.
- Try simple cutting activities—start with snipping straws and move to cutting along thick straight lines. Supervise as needed.
- Hold a doll with one hand and use a sponge or spoon with the other hand to wash or feed the doll.

Daily living activities:

Your child can:

- Hold a container of food with one hand and take the food out with the other hand.
- Hold a bowl when eating.
- Peel a banana.
- Unscrew jars, nuts, bolts etc (use one hand to stabilise while the other hand unscrews). Make sure they don't put small objects in their mouth.
- Be as independent as possible with two-handed dressing activities such as managing zips.
- Help with cooking:
 - Hold a bowl with one hand and stir with the other.
 - Use an old-fashioned egg beater or flour sifter.

Activities where both hands are doing something different

Indoor activities:

- Fishing: Make a fishing rod out of a length of dowel and string with a magnet on the end of the string. Show your child how to pick up pictures and shapes with paper clips attached to them using the magnet. When your child is pulling the 'fish' off the end of the string, one hand holds the rod, while the other hand pulls the 'fish'.
- Building with duplo[®], lego[®] or meccano[®]
- Cutting complex shapes, for example, cutting out pictures and making a scrap book from junk mail or magazine pages.

Daily living activities:

- When your child is old enough, teach them to use two pieces of cutlery to eat their meals.
- Encourage your child to try more dressing activities such as doing up buttons, doing up shoe velcro or laces.

Remember, keep it fun! It should feel like play and not work for you and your child. Encourage their efforts.

Safety considerations

Supervise your child with toys to ensure their safety. Look for and follow the age recommendations and instructions about proper assembly and use of toys. Small objects are a choking risk. Avoid toys with small parts, that are breakable, that have sharp edges or long dangling cords.

More information

Kids Health Information: www.rch.org.au/ot/infosheet/index.cfm?doc_id=10029
[Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne] Accessed 24 June 2013

Safe Toys for Kids:
www.productsafety.gov.au/content/index.phtml/itemId/972370/fromItemId/971693
[Australian Competition and Consumer Commission] Accessed 24 June 2013

Copies of this publication are available from the Disability Information Service
Tel: 1300 786 117 Email: disabilityinfo@dcsi.sa.gov.au Website: www.sa.gov.au/disability Version: June 2013



Licensed under Creative Commons <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/3.0>
Attribute to: *The Dept for Communities and Social Inclusion, Government of South Australia*