

HAND DOMINANCE

Occupational Therapy

Purpose

To clarify which hand produces the best performance and to promote consistent use of this hand in the dominant role for fine motor activities.

Suggestions

Before any clear dominance is established for children, place little emphasis on dominant or non-dominant roles for the hands during fine motor activities. Encourage daily activities that involve symmetrical or alternating use of both hands together, or alternating use of one hand as dominant and then the other. Examples include:

- Using one block in each hand to pick up a block between them, to build towers and buildings. The blocks can be “hot cement blocks” and the need to maneuver them with both hands presents a challenge for many children.
- Clapping activities.
- Drawing on the board using both hands (for example: using both hands symmetrically to make a Christmas tree, heart, diamond, or symmetrical designs).
- Ripping paper to make papier-mâché, to rip out shapes, or to make collages.
- Stringing beads or placing pegs in a pegboard, with first one hand placing the bead or peg while the other holds the board.
- When working on establishing dominance, encourage daily activities that require forceful or continued use of one hand without direction as to which hand to use.



- Place materials at the child's midline (directly in front of the middle of the child's trunk), and allow the child to choose. Track which hand the child uses initially for each task (pencil, drinking from a cup, utensils, cutting, throwing a ball). Some children may switch hands during an activity due to fatigue, so keep that in mind when tracking hand use.
- After several weeks of tracking hand use, watch for one hand to be chosen more often for one-handed activities; used more consistently for grasping writing implements, scissors, and eating utensils; used with more mature grasp patterns; or used with more accurate control for fine motor activities. Ask the child which hand "feels better" during fine motor activities that involve use of one hand.
- When consistent preference for one hand emerges or one hand clearly has superior motor control, focus on developing the dominant and assisting roles for the two hands. Provide and supervise daily practice activities that involve using the hands for different functions, and encourage consistent use of the preferred hand as the dominant and the other hand for assisting in all classroom fine motor activities. Examples of this kind of activity include:
 - Drawing, writing, or painting with one hand, stabilizing paper with the other.
 - Cutting with one hand, stabilizing and turning paper with the other.
 - Using one hand to build towers with blocks, stabilizing and helping to keep blocks lined up with the other.
 - Tracing or scribbling over templates, holding writing implement with one hand while stabilizing templates with the other. Doing this on an upright surface such as a chalkboards or easel requires use of one hand for stabilizing or the template doesn't fall.
 - Opening containers such as jars or plastic containers with lids that require stabilization with one hand and action with the other.
- If no clear dominance or preference emerges after months of practicing and closely watching hand activities, consider a referral to an occupational therapist for assistance in determining which hand to train for writing.

Note

At times, a child may demonstrate a preference of different hands for various activities (e.g. may be left-handed for printing and right-handed for cutting).