



Developing the Small Muscles

Young children need many opportunities to build their small muscles. This is known as **fine motor development**. Small muscles are found in the fingers, toes, wrists, lips, and tongue. They can be developed by having children move their hands or feet in specific ways, such as opening, closing, catching, grasping, or zipping. Try these fun activities with your child to build the small muscles:

YOUR INFANT (birth to 2 years old):

- Give your infant toys that allow him to use his hands and fingers: toys to squeeze, rattles to shake, blocks to stack, cars to move, or simple musical instruments to play.
- Read books with your child. Let your child turn the pages.
- Help your child learn to use a fork and spoon.

YOUR TODDLER (2-3 year olds):

- Let your toddler use scissors to cut up junk mail or old catalogs.
- Use buckets and small shovels to dig in the dirt or sandbox.
- Give your child a large paintbrush and a bucket filled with water. Let her paint the house!
- Do puzzles (different sizes and subjects) with your child; manipulating the puzzle pieces is perfect for developing the small muscles of the hands.
- Practice zipping jackets, snapping the buttons on pants, buttoning shirts, using Velcro, and putting on socks with your child.
- Have your child take the grapes off the vine or peel an orange.
- Let your child draw and write as much as he can. Provide big, non-toxic, washable crayons or markers and sturdy paper to draw on. Use large sheets (the bigger the better!) of blank paper so your child can truly use his imagination. It's okay to scribble!

YOUR PRESCHOOLER (4 year olds):

- Cook with your child. Try having your child measure the ingredients for muffins, spread peanut butter and jelly on bread for a sandwich, slice cheese, tear lettuce into bite-sized pieces for a salad, stir pancake batter, or crack eggs into a bowl.
- Make Play-Doh™ with your child. (Go to www.playdoughrecipe.com for ingredients and instructions.) Then, let her create different works of art out of the Play-Doh™.
- Write your child's name in big letters using sidewalk chalk on the driveway, sidewalk, or other outdoor surface; have your child either trace your letters or try writing his own.
- Have your child practice opening a lunch box, thermos, Ziploc™ sandwich bag, or other disposable snack containers. Ask her to open milk cartons, put the straw in a juice box, or take the lids off plastic containers or water/soda bottles and replace them.
- Make paper chains. Have your child cut paper into strips. Then use a stapler or glue to make each strip form a circle, linking the circles to form a chain.
- Wrap presents! Have your child measure the paper, cut the paper, and use the tape.

Book Suggestion

[Harold and the Purple Crayon](#) by Crockett Johnson