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## Encouraging a Dominant Hand

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### What is it important that my child have a dominant hand?

Research tells us that it is much better for a child to develop strength and dexterity in one hand. This will help them to develop accuracy and speed with fine motor tasks, particularly handwriting. It is far better to have a specialised hand to do the job and one hand to assist than two average hands.

### When does, a dominant hand develop?

A hand dominance usually starts to develop between the ages of 2 to 4, however it is common at this stage for children to swap hands. Between the ages of 4 to 6 years a clear hand dominance is usually established.

### Strategies for identifying which hand is dominant!

If your child does not use one hand as their dominant hand, **do not choose or force them to use one hand**. Instead, carefully observe your child whilst they are playing or doing everyday activities.

- Make a note of whether one hand is used more, or if one hand appears more skilled than the other. For example, observe your child drawing or writing; cutting and pasting; brushing their teeth or hair; eating and drinking; and during any other play activities.
- Encourage your child to participate in a wide range of play and everyday activities to provide opportunities for your child to develop their hand skills.
- Position toys or activities in front, and to the centre, of your child so that they can choose which hand to use rather than using the hand closest to the toy. For example, position pencils in front of your child when they are drawing so that they can choose which hand to hold the pencil with rather than using the hand closest to the pencil.

### Strategies for encouraging the use of the dominant hand!

- Once it is clear which hand your child prefers or demonstrates more skill with, it is important to encourage your child to consistently use this hand. For example, when your child is cutting with scissors encourage your child to use their dominant hand to hold the scissors and the other hand to position the paper.
- Talk to your child about using one hand as a “doing” hand (dominant hand) and the other hand as a “helping” hand.

- Give your child lots of feedback and encouragement so they are aware of which hand they are using and can start to more consistently use one hand as the dominant hand.
- Encourage your child to finish an activity with the hand they started with. If their hand becomes tired or they want to swap hands get them to stop and have a rest (stretching and shaking arms/hands may be helpful). Regular rest breaks may be required until your child builds up the strength and skill to consistently use the dominant hand.

**Below is a list of fine-motor activities for you to try with your child.**

- Drawing, colouring or writing
- Cutting with scissors
- Pasting with a glue stick or brush
- Art and craft activities – ink stamps, stickers, card making, mask making, stencils, tracing
- Sharpening pencils
- Building with blocks or lego
- Playing board games and card games
- Cooking activities – stirring, measuring, sifting
- Playing musical instruments – recorder, violin, keyboard, xylophone, trumpet, guitar
- Computer games
- Puzzles
- Threading activities such as beads or lacing cards

**Below is a list of everyday activities for you to encourage your child to do.**

- Cleaning teeth with a toothbrush
- Brushing hair with a hair brush
- Holding sandwiches, biscuits, fruit or icy-poles
- Using a fork and spoon when eating
- Using a knife to cut up food or butter bread
- Washing or drying the dishes
- Bath-time activities – washing themselves or a toy with a face washer, pouring water into containers, winding up bath toys
- Opening drink bottles and lunch boxes
- Removing lids from yoghurt containers, Vegemite or jam jars
- Zipping up school bags and clothing

**Below is a list of gross-motor activities for you to try with your child.**

- Sand pit activities – digging, pouring, driving cars or trucks
- Digging a small patch in the garden
- Painting
- Throwing balls or beanbags into a basket or at a target
- Playing skittles or bowls
- Hitting a suspended ball or balloon with a bat
- Tennis, cricket and other bat and ball games
- Hammering with nails and wood
- Winding the string when flying a kite
- Washing the car

**Below is a list of activities to encourage your child to cross the midline.**

Encourage your child to do these activities with their dominant hand and make sure your child moves their hands and arms across their body rather than changing hands.

- Position some beanbags or balls on your child’s non-dominant side and ask them to pick them up with their dominant hand and throw them into a basket or at a target
- Draw large drawings or designs on a blackboard or a large piece of paper
- Clean the kitchen table or bench
- Make patterns using finger-paint or shaving cream, going from left to right
- Play “patience” with cards lined up from left side to the right side
- Encourage your child to pick up puzzle pieces placed on their non-dominant side and put them in a board positioned in front of them
- Encourage your child to build with blocks placed on their non-dominant side and make a building or house in front of them
- Drive small cars along roads on a road mat (or make your own roads with masking tape)
- Hit a suspended ball or balloon with a bat or hand

**Contact our team on 1300 856 617 and we can provide more information, support and resources in regards to Encouraging a Dominant Hand.**