



# Play & Grow

FINE MOTOR SKILLS



**Autism Society**  
Inland Empire

# "TIME SPENT PLAYING WITH CHILDREN IS NEVER WASTED."

DAWN LANTERO

Welcome to the "Growing Together" Collection! We have curated this collection of play-based activities and resources designed to help kids develop — all while having fun! While supplies last, we also include a small toy at our monthly events tied to each developmental area. Please supervise your children closely while they are playing with toys to ensure there are no choking hazards.

This resource is also mindful of children with different developmental needs, such as Autism. The activities are designed to be inclusive, offering various ways to engage and support every child's unique journey in emotional development. The age range is 0-5 years who are chronologically older but developmentally at this age.

Each series will focus on a type of child development:

- sensory
- gross motor
- fine motor
- cognitive development
- language development
- social-emotional

If you have any questions, the Autism Society Inland Empire is here to help. We have Resource Specialists who can be reached by email at [info@ieautism.org](mailto:info@ieautism.org) or call us at 951.220.6922.

Thank you to the First Five San Bernardino for their generous financial support in making this project possible. We hope it brings joy, growth, and understanding to your family, helping your child thrive.



# Fine motor skills

**Fine motor development refers to the growth of a child's ability to use the small muscles in their hands, wrists, and fingers to perform precise movements. These skills are essential for daily activities like eating, dressing, writing, and playing.**



**Fine motor skills are important for children, especially in their first five years. These skills help them do everyday things like picking up toys, feeding themselves, and learning to draw or write. As they grow, these abilities are the building blocks for tasks like holding a pencil, tying shoelaces, or buttoning their clothes.**

**When kids develop fine motor skills, they become more independent and confident. Think about how proud they feel when they zip up their jacket or finish a puzzle! These achievements help their physical development and boost their emotional growth and resilience.**

# UNDERSTANDING YOUR CHILD'S DEVELOPMENT

Noticing how your child's fine motor skills are progressing is a wonderful way to support them as they grow. These movements may seem small, but they're vital for helping your child gain independence and confidence in daily tasks. By paying attention to their development, you can celebrate their progress and gently guide them when they need a little extra help.

Here are some examples of typical development of fine motor skills for children in this age range:

## Infants (0–12 months)

- 0–3 months: Reflexively grasp objects; track and bat at toys.
- 3–6 months: Reach and grasp objects; transfer items between hands.
- 6–9 months: Use a raking motion to pick up small items; bang objects together.
- 9–12 months: Develop a pincer grasp; point with index finger; self-feed with fingers.

## Toddlers (1–3 years)

- 12–18 months: Scribble with crayons; stack 2–4 blocks; turn pages in a book.
- 18–24 months: Build a tower of 4–6 blocks; thread large beads; turn single book pages
- 2–3 years: Draw simple shapes; stack 6–10 blocks; snip paper with scissors.

## Preschoolers (3–5 years)

- 3–4 years: Copy letters; use scissors to cut along lines; button large buttons.
- 3 years old: They can start cutting along a straight line and using their non-dominant hand to hold the paper.
- 4–5 years: Write some letters or their name; tie knots; dress independently.



**Fine motor skills, those small but mighty movements, are essential for performing everyday tasks like buttoning a shirt, tying shoelaces, and enjoying meals independently. These abilities also enhance playful moments, whether it's sending a quick text to a friend or giving their furry companion a loving belly rub.**

**Beyond daily life, fine motor skills play a pivotal role in your child's educational journey. They are the keys to success in writing, drawing, and engaging in creative projects. As your child develops these skills, they'll find it easier to express themselves, explore their creativity, and tackle school challenges with enthusiasm.**

**Looking ahead, fine motor skills are just as important in the professional world. From using tools to managing tasks on a computer, these skills open the door to a wide array of career opportunities, helping your child thrive in whatever path they choose.**

**By nurturing your child's fine motor skills, you are empowering them to take on the world with confidence and capability. Every small achievement builds their self-esteem and sets them on a path to success. Encourage their growth today, and watch as they blossom into capable, independent individuals ready to embrace all the wonderful experiences life has to offer!**

**What are examples of fine motor skills?**

- Holding a pencil and writing or drawing with it.
- Using scissors.
- Folding clothes.
- Typing on a keyboard.
- Fastening a button.
- Zipping a zipper
- Tying your shoes.
- Twisting a doorknob.
- Eating with utensils, like a fork and spoon.
- Playing video games using a controller.
- Playing an instrument, like a guitar, flute or piano.

# SIGNS TO WATCH FOR

Sometimes, delays or challenges in fine motor skills can make certain tasks more frustrating for your child. That's why noticing these skills early is so important—it gives you the opportunity to provide encouragement or seek additional support if needed. Early attention can make all the difference in ensuring they're ready for the next big steps, like writing, drawing, or tying their shoes. Remember it's not about perfection or comparisons—it's about understanding and celebrating your child's unique journey.

Here are some signs of developmental delay in fine motor skills for children ages 0–5 years old that parents should be aware of:

## Infants (0–12 months)

- Difficulty grasping toys or objects, even when placed in their hand.
- Trouble bringing hands to the mouth or transferring objects between hands.
- Lack of interest in reaching for or holding objects by 6 months.
- Not developing a pincer grasp (thumb and forefinger) by 9–12 months.

## Toddlers (1–2 years)

- Struggling to stack even a few blocks or manipulate toys designed for their age.
- Difficulty scribbling with crayons or markers.
- Trouble turning pages in a board book or picking up small objects.
- Avoiding tasks that involve hand use, like self-feeding with fingers or a spoon.

## Preschoolers (2–5 years)

- Trouble holding crayons or pencils with a proper grip (using a fist grip beyond 3 years).
- Difficulty drawing simple shapes (circle, square) by 3–4 years.
- Struggling to use child-safe scissors by 4 years.
- Inability to fasten buttons, use zippers, or complete basic self-care tasks like dressing by 5 years.
- Avoiding activities like building with blocks, puzzles, or crafts.

A few additional signs to look for is your child's overall behavior. Your child may show lack of interest in or frustration with tasks requiring hand use. Another sign is they may appear clumsy or uncoordinated with hand movements. Lastly, they may also show a significant difference in strength or coordination between the two hands.



## HOW TO SUPPORT A CHILD WITH FINE MOTOR DELAYS

It's completely natural to feel concerned if you notice your child struggling with fine motor skills. Every child develops at their own pace, and some children may need a little extra help to reach their full potential. Seeking professional support is not a sign that you've done anything wrong; rather, it's a loving and proactive way to ensure your child gets the tools and guidance they need to thrive.

Fine motor skills are our tiny movements with our hands, fingers, feet, and toes. They allow us to do countless everyday tasks. Fine motor skills are the foundation for many important activities in your child's life, from playing and drawing to feeding themselves and getting dressed. If these skills aren't developing as expected, your child may find some tasks more frustrating or challenging. Professional guidance can make a significant difference by providing targeted strategies and tools to help your child grow at their own pace.

Occupational therapists (OTs) and other specialists are trained to understand your child's unique needs and strengths. They'll work with you to create a manageable and fun plan, often incorporating play and creative activities. This kind of tailored support helps build skills and boosts your child's confidence and independence, setting them up for success in school and everyday life.

Early intervention is especially important because the sooner challenges are addressed, the more opportunities your child has to catch up and thrive. You're not alone in this journey—professionals are there to guide and support you, and your involvement as a parent is a crucial part of your child's progress. Seeking help is a loving, proactive choice that ensures your child has the tools and support they need to reach their fullest potential.



**Check out our list of  
Occupational Therapists who  
have experience with fine  
motor skills & activities:**

# FUN AND INEXPENSIVE FINE MOTOR ACTIVITIES



As a parent, you play a key role in supporting your child's fine motor growth. Simple activities like playing with building blocks, threading beads, or letting them help in the kitchen can strengthen these muscles and make learning fun. Encouraging these skills in their early years lays the foundation for success in both their daily life and future learning. It's a gift that will serve them for years to come.

We have included ideas that you can do at home with a few items that are free or very low cost with items you can purchase from the Dollar Tree or other stores.





# INFANTS (0–12 MONTHS)



**Helping infants develop their motor skills is important for their growth. These activities help babies improve their physical skills and also stimulate their brains and senses.**

**Here are some fun activities for babies ages 0–12 months:**

- **Tummy Time with Toys:** Place small toys just out of reach to encourage your baby to reach and grab them.
- **Grasping Objects:** Give your baby soft rattles or textured toys to hold and shake.
- **Finger Plays:** Sing songs like "Itsy Bitsy Spider" that involve finger movements.
- **Transferring Objects:** Provide lightweight blocks for your baby to pass from one hand to the other.
- **Pincher Finger Practice:** Scatter small, safe foods like puffs or pieces of banana on their tray for them to pick up.



# TODDLERS 1–2 YEARS

- **Scribbling:** Provide large crayons or markers and let your child explore making marks on paper.
- **Stacking and Sorting:** Use stacking cups, blocks, or shape sorters to develop hand-eye coordination.
- **Sponge Water Play:** Offer small sponges with a bowl of water to soak and squeeze.
- **Finger Feeding:** Allow self-feeding with finger foods to practice the pincer grasp.
- **Playdough Fun:** Roll, pinch, and squish playdough to strengthen hand muscles.



## 2–3 YEARS

- **Beading:** Use large beads and string or pipe cleaner to create necklaces or bracelets.
- **Ripping Paper:** Give them paper to rip up or crumble to strengthen hand muscles.
- **Sticker Play:** Let them peel and stick stickers onto paper or surfaces.
- **Building Blocks:** Encourage building towers with small blocks or Lego-style toys.
- **Puzzles:** Offer large and small piece puzzles to encourage problem solving and manipulation of objects.



# PRESCHOOL 3-4 YEARS

**Fine motor skills are really important for kids because they help them do everyday tasks independently. These tasks include opening doors, zipping up jackets, brushing teeth, washing hands, and using a fork. When kids start preschool, fine motor skills become even more important for activities like writing, cutting with scissors, and buttoning clothes.**

**Developing these skills during preschool is essential not just for writing but also for other self-care activities. Fine motor skills help kids pick up small objects, rotate their wrists, and plan their movements, which are all important for becoming more independent. Encouraging your child to practice these skills can make a big difference in their ability to do daily tasks independently.**

- **Tracing and Drawing:** Offer tracing worksheets or encourage free drawing with crayons or markers. You can find these worksheets online for free or purchase workbooks dedicated to improving fine motor skills.
- **Cutting Shapes:** Provide lines or shapes for them to cut along using child-safe scissors.
- **Sorting Games:** Sort small objects, like buttons or coins, into categories using tweezers or fingers.
- **Self-Care Tasks:** Practice zipping, buttoning, and snapping clothes or fastening Velcro straps.
- **Playdough Tools:** Make playdough creations using tools like rolling pins, cookie cutters, or molds.

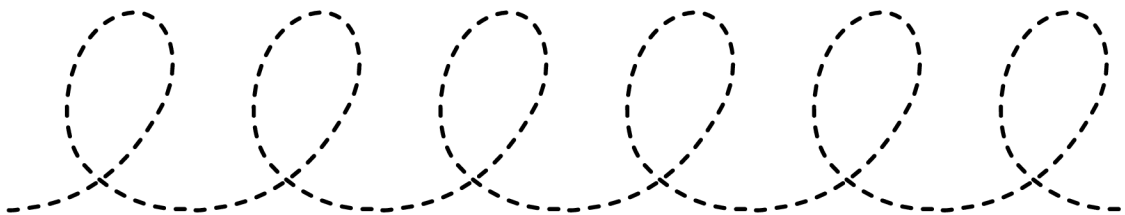
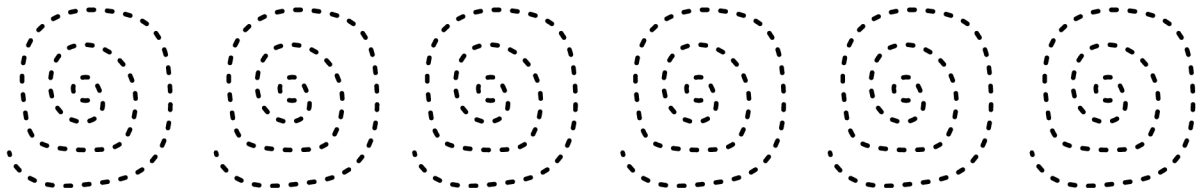
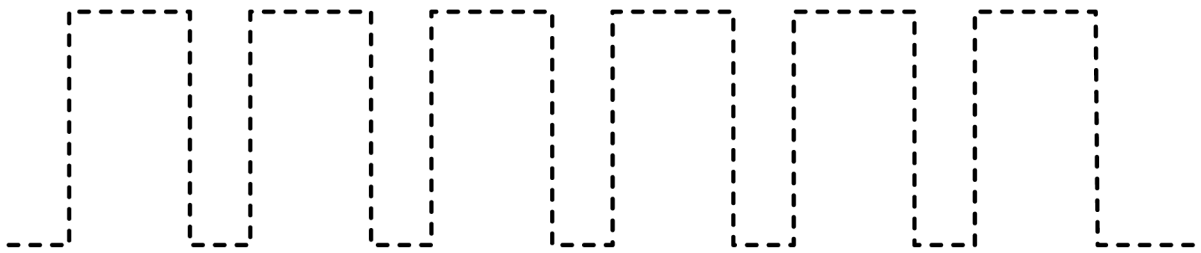
# 4-5 YEARS



- **Pom Poms Sorting:** Sorting pom-poms with jumbo tweezers makes a fantastic fine motor activity. Children often enjoy sorting the pom-poms into colored cups. If you don't have these jumbo tweezers, you can use tongs. This is an excellent color recognition task, too!
- **Tracing:** Tracing requires fine motor control. This simple activity is perfect for little hands. Provide pencils or markers to practice writing letters, numbers, their name, or wiggly lines on a page. You can add some scented markers to make it more of a sensory play activity. Additionally, this is a great eye-hand coordination activity. There are even apps that a child can use on a tablet to practice tracing.
- **Playdough Activities:** Playdough is a tried-and-true activity for building fine motor skills. By simply squeezing, squishing, and rolling the dough, children strengthen the hand muscles that will come in handy later when it's time to write, color, cut, and perform various other tasks.
- **Clothes Pin Activities:** Using clothes pins, children can work on their small hand muscles and pincer grasp. There are lots of ideas online for making this a game.
- **Arts and Crafts:** Engage in crafts that involve gluing, cutting, and assembling small parts.
- **Board Games:** Play games that require moving small pieces, like checkers or Jenga.
- **Cooking Together:** Let them stir, pour, or sprinkle ingredients while cooking or baking.
- **Shoe Tying Practice:** Practice tying shoelaces using a toy or real shoes.
- **Pattern Blocks, Threading Beads, and Puzzles:** These are fun ways to work on these skills.



# Line Tracing



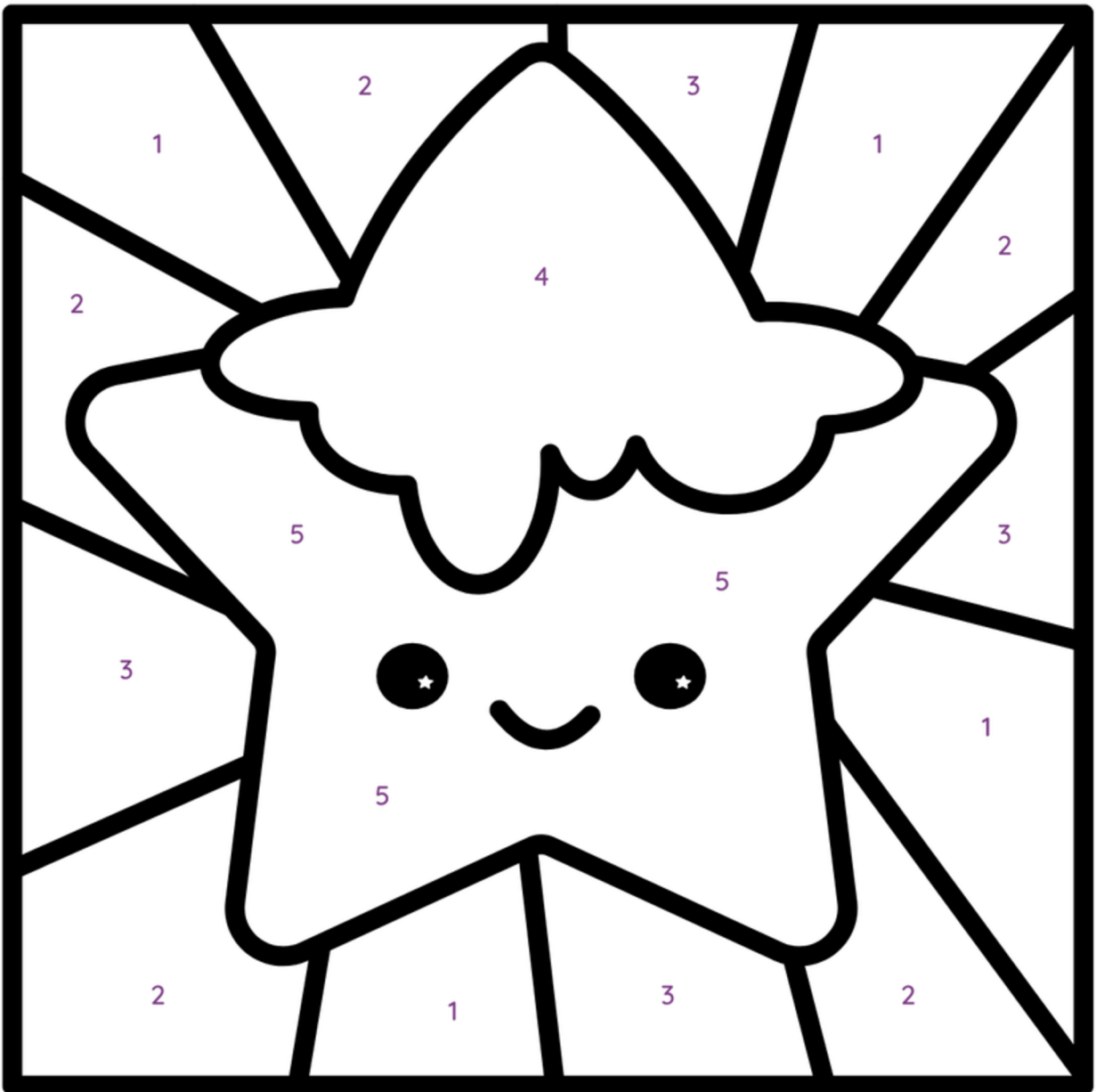
# SCISSOR SKILLS

Carefully cut along the dotted lines to help strengthen your fine motor skills.



# COLOR BY NUMBER

Use the color key below.





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**Your local Autism connection**

