Helping children with motor development is one way you can help them learn the skills necessary for later school success. In the summer issue we talked about the development of gross motor skills, skills that use the larger muscles of the body. In this issue we address fine motor skills, skills that use the smaller muscles of the body, such as the hands and fingers.

Young children need to be able to use their hands and fingers for many things, such as feeding and dressing themselves, holding a crayon or marker, and carrying objects, for example. Equally important, fine motor skills enable children to play—building with blocks, banging a drum, pushing a toy truck, for example—which is how children learn.

Here are two types of activities you can do with your class to promote fine motor skills:

**Play dough**

Play dough is a perennial favorite. It is safe, easily available, and ideal for older infants and toddlers.

Squeezing play dough can help strengthen the small muscles of the hand. Rolling it between the palms to make balls and snakes encourages both eye-hand coordination and the ability to look at the hands while they work together at the midline of the body.

Poking holes into play dough balls helps with finger isolation—that is, moving fingers individually, a skill necessary for many self-help and school tasks. Pinching play dough with the thumb and fingers helps develop the grasp essential for holding writing or coloring tools.

**Paper play**

Paper comes in a wide variety of types, thicknesses, and colors, lending itself to hundreds of activities for developing small muscles. Tearing strips of newspaper for a collage enhances grasping skills, for example. Crumpling recycled paper into balls or folding it into a paper hat strengthens the muscles of the hands and fingers.

Pinching squares of tissue paper between fingers and gluing them to a design helps children learn to pick up and manipulate small items.

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**When ECI comes to your class**

Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) provides services to families who have infants or toddlers with qualifying disabilities or developmental delays. Most ECI services are provided at home, but some parents may ask that ECI services also be provided in their child’s preschool classroom.

It is helpful for a child to learn new skills in a class or group because the child:

- learns skills useful for everyday life,
- has other children to model the desired skills, and
- has many opportunities to practice the new skills.
What will an ECI service provider do in your class? The interventionist will help you find ways to help a child enrolled in ECI to develop fine motor skills. The assistance may include:

- Identifying the toys and materials in your room that promote development of fine motor skills.
- Suggesting changes in the placement of toys or materials that will encourage the child to use them.
- Explaining how to adapt materials or routines to support the development of fine motor skills.

What can you do to help the ECI provider be more effective? Because you work with the child every day, you have valuable knowledge and experience, which can help you do the following:

- Name the activities, toys, and peers the child likes. This list will help the ECI provider know what motivates the child.
- Point out the child’s strengths. The provider can help you build on the child’s strengths to improve areas of delay.
- Identify strategies the child uses to get his or her needs met.
- Create opportunities for the child to practice the desired skills, and allow extra time for mastery.

What can you and the ECI service provider do together to support the child’s fine motor development? It can be difficult to collaborate while you are responsible for a group of active infants or toddlers. Consider the following:

- Find a means of communication that works for both of you. Choose a time and place to talk personally, jot notes on a writing pad, send a text message via cell phone, or send e-mail from a laptop.
- Share honestly what works and what doesn’t work.
- Celebrate your shared successes.