

# Occupational Therapy Activities You Can Do at Home

## Dressing Skills

- **Practice Your Go To School Routine:** Many kids are working on independently completing their arrival/dismissal routine in the classroom. You can incorporate this into a play activity (Pretend to Go to School) and have them put on their jacket and backpack giving them as much assistance as needed to complete the tasks.
- **Pre-Fastener Skills:** If your child is not quite ready to work with fasteners (buttons, snaps, zippers), these fun activities can help to build manipulation skills and get both hands working together efficiently:
  - o **Stickers:** Have your child peel stickers from a sheet and place them on a paper.
  - o **Stringing Beads:** If you have large beads with holes, have kids practice stringing large beads onto a shoe lace with knot at the end to keep them from falling off. If you don't have them, try stringing cereal (Cheerios) or pasta (ziti) onto a shoe lace.
  - o **Tooth Pick Practice:** Have your child pick up tooth picks and push them into Styrofoam or Play Doh.
  - o **Play with Loose Buttons:** Play with buttons – glue them on paper, sort them by color into an empty egg carton, try stacking them.
- **Beginning Faster Skills:** As kids master pre-fastener skills, move to these activities to get them ready for working with clothing on their body.
  - o **Placing Coins or Discs into a Container:** Practice putting coins (or flat discs) into a bank or slit made in a plastic container.
  - o **Buttons:** Using loose buttons, lay an unbuttoned shirt on the table and have kids push the loose buttons through the holes. Remember: bigger is better to start this activity.
  - o **Zippers:** Lay a jacket on the table and model and provide hand over hand assistance to teach your child how to hook the zipper, move it up and down, and unhook it.
- **Fastener Practice:** As skills progress, start practicing during your child's dressing routine giving assistance as needed. Use dress up play time to practice with costumes or oversized clothing.

## Exercises to Increase Core Strength

- Core strength and stability is essential for kids to be able to sit and work on handwriting and fine motor activities at the table. These are a few fun animal exercises to increase core stability:
  - o **Snake Curls:** Lay on your back with your knees bent with hands on thighs. Slowly curl up moving your hands to your knees and hold them there for three to five seconds. Make a hissing sound as you do it! Repeat five times.
  - o **Bridges:** Lay on your backs with your knees bent and together. Slowly raise your buttocks off the ground and hold for up to five seconds. Make it fun by having your child's favorite small animals walk under the bridge (you do this).
  - o **Crab Walks:** Sit with hands and feet on the floor. Bring your buttocks off the floor and try to crab walk on your hands and feet backward for a few steps. Increase distance as strength increases. Try walking forward too!

## Fine Motor Strengthening

- There are many fun activities to work on strengthening the muscles in the hands – here are a few of our favorites:
  - o **Hidden Treasure Play Doh:** Hide small toys, coins, buttons, etc. in Play Doh and have your child find and remove them. Make it fun by creating an imaginative story about the toys or objects. You can also use Play Doh to **make small balls** (use thumb, index and middle finger with a small piece of Play Doh) or **roll it into a long skinny snake** !
  - o **Hungry Tennis Ball:** Cut a 1-2” slit in an old, used tennis ball. Have the child squeeze the ball to open the slit with one hand and place small objects (beans, marbles, coins) in the slit with the other. Have your kids add eyes, nose, and hair to your ball or make it look like a favorite character (i.e. – Minion)
  - o **Bubble Wrap:** Have your child pinch it between their thumb and index finger. Tape it to the table and have them pop with just their thumb or index finger.

## Handwriting Practice

- **What Handwriting Skill do I Work On?** So that you are giving your child the appropriate tasks to work on, you can look at the latest progress monitor on your child’s IEP; or, contact your Occupational Therapist to discuss their current goals and strategies that are being worked on at school.
- **Pre-Handwriting Activities:** If your child is not yet working with writing utensils, these are some fun, hands on ways work on shape and letter formation. Before learning letters, children learn pre-writing strokes (vertical line, horizontal line, a cross, circle, diagonal line) which are the foundation for proper letter formation.
  - o **Finger Paint or Shaving Cream:** Spread finger paint or shaving cream on the table in front of your child. Form the strokes for your child (i.e – make a vertical line and say ‘down’) then see if your child will imitate. Demonstrate multiple times and if needed put your hand over theirs and make the stroke.
  - o **Play Doh:** Use Play Doh to make lines, shapes, or letters
  - o **Tracing in Jell-O Powder:** Put powder from a Jell-O packet on a small tray or into a zip lock sandwich bag. Have your child practice making lines, shapes or letters using his/her index finger.
- **Holding Writing Tools:** How a child holds a writing tool (crayon, marker, pencil, chalk, etc.) is called their grasp pattern. It changes as a child grows from a fist grasp to functional grasp by Kindergarten. You can encourage this development at home by giving them opportunities to color, trace, and imitate shapes and letters that you form first.
- **Activities to Work On Writing Skills:** So that you are giving your child the appropriate tasks to work on, contact your Occupational Therapist to discuss their current goals and strategies that are being worked on at school.
  - o **Coloring Pictures:** Have your child color at home. Use of short crayons (break standard sized crayons in half) will encourage use of functional grasp pattern.
  - o **Drawing People:** Have your child practice drawing people with head, body, arms, and legs; then, have them add all features of the head.
  - o **Trace Paths / Lines:** You can download fun worksheets for tracing paths and lines; or, make them yourself. The difficulty level (i.e. – tracing vertical lines versus lines with curves or angles) should align with your child’s current skill level.
  - o **Trace First Name:** In preparation for Kindergarten, a child learns to trace his/her first name using upper and lower case formation. You can write their name for them on a

paper and help them to trace the letters with their finger or a crayon or marker. Say each letter out loud as you trace it.

- **Trace Pre-Writing Strokes:** On a paper, draw a vertical line, horizontal line, cross, and circle. Have your child trace each and provide hand over hand assistance as needed to form these lines and shapes. As your child masters these, you can add diagonal lines, a square and triangle.
- **Imitate Pre-Writing Strokes:** Once your child can trace these strokes, start working on 'imitation' which means you make the formation, then they form it on their own. You may need to give hand over hand assistance at first until this skill develops.
- **Copy Pre-Writing Strokes:** Once a child has mastered imitation, they are ready to work on copying these formations from a model. You can give them a paper with the shapes drawn in boxes on the top part of the paper and tell them to copy it in the box below.
- **Letter Formation:** Children learn to form uppercase letters first. Once your child knows their letters, you can have them practice tracing, imitating, or copying letters.

## Scooping & Spearing

- Many kids are working on the use of spoons and forks during mealtime and snack time. To help your child, you can place your hand over theirs to model how to scoop or spear and bring to their mouth. Decrease the amount of assistance as they have success. Also, you can add a few fun activities during play time to work on these skills:
  - **Scooping Bins:** Take a plastic bin (shoe box size) and fill with dry rice, beans, or macaroni. Give your child a spoon and have them practice scooping and dumping the material. If needed, put your hand over your child's and model how to scoop properly. As skill increases, give your child two bowls and have them scoop and then place the material in the empty bowl.
  - **Play Doh Meatballs:** You can have a child practice rolling Play Doh into small balls, then, have them use a fork to spear the balls and put them on a plate. They may need help in the beginning to apply the right amount of pressure and to remove the balls from the fork onto the plate.

## Self Regulation Activities / Calming Sensory Strategies

- Create a **quiet space** where your kids can go that limits sound, light, and activity where they can take a break, calm down, and regroup. A quiet space can be as simple as a corner with pillows and stuffed animals or a tent made with a sheet or blanket with a bean bag chair.
- Use **sensory bins** for a calming break made from items found in your kitchen. Take a plastic bin (shoe box size) and fill with dry rice, beans, or macaroni. Let your kids just relax and play for a few minutes.
- Use **heavy work breaks** to stimulate muscles and joints to increase overall level of calmness. Heavy work means moving your body against resistance. Use fun games such as pushing a laundry basket with clothes, carrying a stack of books from one room to the other, or pulling a sibling down the hall on a blanket.
- **Yoga and Breathing (Kristina)**

## Scissor Skills

- **Pre-scissor skills:** If your child is not quite ready to work with scissors, these are fun pre-scissor skill activities you can do at home.
  - o Use **kitchen tongs** to pick up small objects such as cotton or puff balls and place them in a bowl.
  - o Use a **spray bottle** with water and have your child go outside and spray a bush or paint the fence.
  - o **Tear pieces of paper** into small pieces and use the pieces to make a picture or fill in a picture from a coloring book, or fill in a shape (circle, triangle, square).
- **Scissor Skills:** Learning to use scissors takes time and supervision is needed during the learning process.
  - o **Scissor Safety:** Always supervise your child when working with scissors. Review basic scissor safety rules together: use scissors at the table; do not touch the blades; do not cut hair, clothes or fabric; do not touch the blades; look where you are cutting; always hand scissor to someone else with your hand wrapped around the blades.
  - o **Six Rules of Cutting:** Remind your child of these rules as needed: 1) thumb goes in the little loop, 2) thumbs are up when cutting, 3) cut away from the body, 4) no chicken wings (arms should be close to your body), 5) steer with your helper hand (turn the paper not the scissors), 6) stay on the line.
  - o **Skill Progression:** Scissor skills take time to develop – practice is the key. Start with thicker mediums first as they are easier to work with (index cards, paint samples, construction paper and progress to writing paper)
    - The first skill learned is **snipping** (closing the scissors once). A fun way to practice this is snipping straws, Play Doh rolled into a long skinny snake, or small strips of thick paper. You may have to provide hand over hand assistance and model skills at this stage.
    - As kids develop skills to open and close several times, start working on **cutting straight lines**. Make thick lines on paper for them to cut starting with two inches and increase length with success.
    - If straight lines are mastered, start working on **lines with angles** so they need to turn the paper. As your child's ability to turn paper increases, work on **curved lines**. The next step is cutting out **simple shapes** (circle, triangle, square); then, more **complex shapes** (star, heart, etc.) and pictures from magazines or coloring books.

## Visual Perceptual Skills

- Visual perceptual skills are the skills that a child uses to make sense of what he or she sees. These skills are important for many everyday activities such as writing, dressing, reading etc. Here are some fun activities to work on these skills at home.
  - o **Hidden Picture/Object Games or Books:** Use 'Find the Object' books, 'I Spy' cards, or gather 4-8 common household objects and place them on the table and have your child find them one at a time.
  - o **Play with Construction Type Activities:** Play with building blocks, building kits, Lego, or Lego Duplo
  - o **Dot to Dot:** Have your child draw lines between two stickers placed on a paper or work with simple dot to dot activity sheets.

## Visual Motor Skills

- Visual Motor activities help a child with tracking, visual focusing, and hand-eye coordination skills. Here are a few fun ways to work on these skills.
  - o **Stacking Activities:** Work on stacking blocks or cups. Kids may need your help to steady a wobbly tower at first but with practice will gain skill and mastery.
  - o **Pegboards and Puzzles:** These are great activities to work on visual focus and kids need to focus to get pegs or pieces in the holes/forms properly. Give assistance as needed when starting the activity and decrease help as your child gains mastery.
  - o **Sorting and Pouring:** **Sorting:** Give your child small objects (pegs, buttons, cereal, etc.) to sort into little cups by color or shape. As the objects have to be placed in a specific container, it is a great activity to work on eye hand coordination. **Pouring:** This is a great activity to work on during tubby time. Give you child cups of varying sizes or measuring cups and have them pour water to and from different sized containers.

## Contact Your Child's Occupational Therapist

If you would like to discuss activities to work on your child's specific goals, e-mail your Occupational Therapist directly:

- Jane Zak: [jjak@wvcakids.org](mailto:jjak@wvcakids.org)
- Shari Aude: [saude@wvcakids.org](mailto:saude@wvcakids.org)
- Kristina Toussaint: [ktoussaint@wvcakids.org](mailto:ktoussaint@wvcakids.org)

## Helpful Links

Free Worksheets (tracing, shapes, letters): <https://www.worksheetfun.com/preschool-worksheets/>

Free Lined Paper: <http://www.first-school.ws/theme/printables/writing-paper/handwriting.htm>

Free Preschool Relief Packet: <https://www.havefunteaching.com/resource/relief-packs/preschool-coronavirus-relief-pack/>

The Inspired Tree House: Free Occupational and Physical Therapy Home Program Activities: <https://theinspiredtreehouse.com/>

Development Progression of Pencil Grasp: <http://mamaot.com/developmental-progression-of-pencil-grasp/>