

Hand Strength Development Activities

*Here's a list of activities to incorporate and practice at home with your child to promote development of hand strength for improved ease with gripping a pencil/crayon, writing, scissor skills, and clothing fasteners to support their school-based occupational therapy services.

-*Tamara Hollenback, OT - thollenback@staffordschools.org*

-*Amy Noto, OT - anoto@staffordschools.org*

Weight Bearing/Shoulder Strengthening Activities

- Crawling** – Try relay races, obstacle courses, and other games.
- Donkey kicks** – Have the child bend forward to place his hands on the floor and then kick his legs up behind them like a donkey.
- Wheelbarrow walks** – Have the child place her hands on the floor while you hold her feet and see how far she can walk on her hands.
- Yoga for kids** – Poses like downward dog, table pose, and handstand are great weight bearing poses for kids to try.
- Play in All Fours** – Try playing board games, coloring, or playing with toys in a crawling position so the child is holding his weight on his hands.
- Color on vertical surfaces** - Tape coloring pages or drawing paper on the wall and have the child color while standing to improve shoulder girdle stability.

Pushing and Pulling Toys

- Legos**– Great for developing grasp strength when connecting and pulling apart.
- Velcro** – Pulling against heavy duty Velcro is another great hand strengthener. Try adapting books using Velcro, making file folder games, or making other fun velcro fine motor tasks.
- Rubber Bands** – Kids can stretch and pull against the resistance to create masterpieces on a geoboard.
- Tape** – Pulling tape off of the roll and/or pulling it off of various surfaces (walls, tables, floors) is a great hand strengthener for kids.
- Rolling Pins** – Grasping, pushing, and rolling with a rolling pin are great ways to strengthen little hands and fingers. Try it on play dough, bubble wrap, or during cooking activities.
- Theraband** – This stretchy stuff is another great “tug of war tool”. There are all kinds of ways to pull on it and against it to strengthen hands.
- Climbing** – Climbing on just about anything is awesome for building hand strength in kids. Think ropes, ladders, trees, jungle gyms, any playground equipment, and more!
- Tearing paper** – Two little hands working together to tear through paper is a simple and fun way to target hand strength.
- Cooking with Kids** – Kneading dough, stirring batter, scooping, cutting, etc.

Squeezing Activities

- Playing with playdough, putty, or clay** – Squishing, pinching, rolling, squeezing, smushing – all great for building muscles in the hands.
- Sponges – Get kids involved in chores** where they have to wring out sponges or wet rags
- Spray bottles, water guns, squeeze bottles** – Have a water fight in the backyard, have kids water your plants with a spray bottle, or squirt and wash windows with water.
- Squeeze Balls or Stretchy Balls** – Use these as fidget toys or challenge kids to do several reps of squeezing or pulling to build strength.
- Clips and clothespins** – There are a zillion ways to play with clips and clothespins. Clip them on strings/chairs/containers/clothing. Use them to match colors/letters/numbers.
- Hole Punches** – These little hand strengtheners come in all shapes and sizes – great for making hole punch crafts.
- Scissors** – Try cutting against resistance: thicker paper, cardboard cereal boxes, cardstock, playdoh or clay.
- Glue Bottles** – Crafting with liquid glue is an easy way to help kids work on hand strength.
- Turkey Baster** – Squeezing the squishy end of a turkey baster...what could be more fun? Use one to blow pompoms or ping pong balls across the table
- Sensory Balloons** – Fill balloons with dry rice, beans, flour, or play dough. Have kids squeeze and squish them in their hands to build strength.
- Crumpling Paper** – Have your child help be the recycler in the family, but before they throw paper or junk mail away, they have to crumple up each piece into a small ball to shoot a basket into the recycling bin.
- Bubble Wrap** – It comes in all different sizes and kids love the sound it makes when they snap it between their fingers. The bubble wrap with the smallest bubbles is best for strengthening individual fingers, while larger bubble wrap can strengthen the whole hand
- Tongs and Tweezers** – Use them to pick up pompoms and other toys or use them to pick up blocks to stack into a tower.