

Activities to Promote Index Finger Isolation and Strengthening

Compiled by Deanna Iris Sava, MS, OTR/L
and
Carrie Lippincott, OTR/L

Several occupational therapists contributed ideas for this list of fine motor activities. Before engaging in any fine motor tasks, several areas should be addressed including posture, sensory processing issues, trunk and shoulder stability, visual motor and visual perceptual skills, and hand functioning. Once these areas have been addressed as needed, the following fine motor activities may be helpful to improve your child's fine motor issues. Thanks to the therapists who contributed the following ideas:

1. **"Flippers"** game (from Therapro). The kids flip them into an egg carton with colored stickers, each color worth a certain amount of points. Each time a point is scored, the child runs to the chalkboard to make an appropriate tally mark with a short piece of chalk. While using the Flippers, be sure to remind the child to practice keeping all of the joints of the index finger in flexion. Points are only earned, if the index finger is flexed.

Ants in the Pants and Tiddly Frogs (from PDP Products) are other variations of the Flippers game. Each product varies a little in the resistance level of the plastic, so strength grading is possible with using a few varieties of this game.

2. **Play with clay**, use the thumb and index fingers to pinch pieces of clay off. Make dragons and pinch marks on top of the dragon. Play with pushing pegs or "candles" into the clay using the thumb and index fingers. Be sure remind the child to keep his index finger "rounded" (or flexed).
3. **Push Perfection pieces into theraputty**. Have the child hold the theraputty in the non-dominant hand and with the index and thumb of the other hand, use a Perfection piece to press a shape into the theraputty.

Use a resistance level that allows the child to maintain the index-thumb in a flexed or "O" shape with some concentration. Another variation can be to hide in theraputty, small items such as little animal figures, pegs, beads, or coins. Watch out to make sure the child is not hyperextending or bending backward any joints.

4. **Cutting with a plastic knife**. Have the child roll out a clay snake and cut it into "cookie" pieces with a plastic knife held by the index finger resting down the length of the knife.

5. **Finger Tug of War.** Use small piece of soft rubber tubing or a popsicle stick. Have the child make an "O" with his thumb and index fingers, making sure all the joints are flexed and pinch one end of the tubing. Then you pinch the other end of the tube. Cue the child to keep the "O" shape and pull.

6. **Travel sized spray bottles.** Reuse a small travel sized bottle from hair spray. After rinsing it out, refill it with water and use it to mist plants. Be sure your child holds it with the thumb and middle fingers around the bottle and uses the index finger to depress the pump button. Try to find a bottle that is not too hard for the child to pump while keeping all the joints rounded or flexed.

Important Note: Don't let your child switch to a key grip, pinching the item to the *side* of the index finger like a key is held. This is a stronger grip so it is a natural reaction, but it's not strengthening the muscles used in hand writing.