

Separation of the Two Sides of the Hand

by Carrie Lippincott, OTR/L

During normal development, children learn to differentiate two different functions in their hand, one is stability and the other dexterity. The ring fingers and little finger side of the hand are for generating power. Try doing a tug of war with a rope and feel where the strength comes from. Along with providing strength, children usually learn to tuck these two fingers into their palm and use them to provide a stable base for the thumb, index and middle fingers to manipulate objects. Some children during the course of their development do not learn to separate these two functions in their hands. These children compromise the quality of their fine motor activities by using the ring and little fingers to help in manipulating objects, picking up objects and even using these fingers on their pencils.

As a parent, by providing a few activities for your child to do, you can help with the separation of the two sides of the hand.

1. **Fine Motor Containers.** Make fine motor containers out of yogurt containers. Simply find some type of small object around the house such as pennies, paper clips, small rocks or gems, small erasers, checkers, buttons etc. With an exacto knife, cut out a hole a little bigger than the object. Then have your child put the objects into the containers, while he/she practices keeping the ring/little fingers tucked into the palm. If needed, place a pom pom or small piece of wadded up Kleenex under the ring/little fingers to help your child remember to keep them tucked.
2. **Spray Bottles.** Use a spray bottle to squirt water making sure that the ring/little fingers are around the neck of the bottle and the index/middle fingers are on the trigger. Your child can mist plants, “paint” a picture on the sidewalk. One activity that my children love is to send them into the shower and use the spray bottle to squirt shaving cream off the walls of the shower. If I’m feeling energetic, I’ll put some food color so they can see the water on the wall. This one keeps them entertained for quite awhile and their hands get quite a workout.
3. **The Squirrel Game.** Have your son or daughter put his/her forearms on a table. Pick up small objects (small marshmallow, Cheerios, small erasers, paper clips) with thumb, middle, index fingers and “squirrel” or store the objects in the palm of the hand under the ring and little fingers. Make a challenge to see how many of each item your child can store under their fingers before dropping one. Then see if on later date if your child can beat the record.
4. **Practice Cutting.** Be sure your child is holding the scissors properly. The thumb and middle fingers are placed in the loop of the scissors with the index finger on the underside. The ring and middle fingers are to be bent or flexed and remain motionless. For this reason, I do not encourage the use of the Fiskars scissors, they are designed to put the ring finger in the loop. You are better off sticking to the “old fashioned” circular loop type of scissors. If your child is having difficulties keeping the ring/little fingers still, tuck a pom pom, piece of

soft foam or wadded Kleenex between the ring/little fingers and the palm. If cutting is a challenge, start with just opening and closing the scissors to a silly story, then to cutting straws, then to snipping index cards, old playing cards, or manilla folders.

5. **Tiny Balls** Roll small 1/4" to 1/8" balls from clay, silly putty, play dough, rolling it between the thumb, index and middle fingers while keeping the ring and little fingers flexed. If needed, put a pom pom, piece of soft foam or wad of Kleenex under the ring and little fingers.

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