



Fine and Gross Motor

About fine and gross motor

'Motor skills' describes the ability to control and coordinate movements. This can include fine motor control (e.g. small movements of the fingers and hands) and gross motor control (e.g. large and coordinated movements of the trunk, arms, and legs).

Some children with neurological and developmental disorders have challenges with learning and mastering new motor skills. For example, children with cerebral palsy or acquired brain injury (e.g. following a stroke) might find it challenging to control and coordinate the parts of their bodies which perform fine and gross motor tasks. As a teacher, individual adjustments might need to be made to help support children who experience fine and gross motor challenges to learn new motor skills.

Evidence-based strategies

Work Collaboratively

- **Get more information.** Talk with the child and their parents to find out the child's unique strengths and abilities, any areas they need more support with, and the best methods of communication.
- **Build a relationship with other professionals involved in supporting the child.** Working together can lead to a shared understanding of how best to support the child and use strategies that are the same in the primary school setting and other settings such as home.

Practise handwriting skills

- **Consider handwriting activities.** Consider spending short periods of time, multiple times a week, on handwriting. An activity that might help is getting children to copy a correct version of each letter of the alphabet. Arrows around each letter, indicating the direction of each stroke, and the order of each stroke to write a letter, may be helpful.



- **Help children self-reflect on handwriting.** Some children may benefit from activities that encourage them to self-reflect on their handwriting. For example, help children understand the shape of letters (e.g. where does the letter 'a' start and finish). Ask them to practise writing the same letter, at the same size, repeatedly (e.g. the letter 'a' eight times). Then, ask children to choose which letter they wrote best and draw a circle around it. You can also ask them to use an arrow to show which part of the letter they need to improve and practise that part.

Tailor how you teach

- **Plan ahead.** Before beginning an activity, check that any equipment or adjustments that might encourage full participation of the child are available.
- **Focus on what students can do.** Provide encouragement, especially of children's strengths and achievements. Your attitude can make a difference in student's participation and learning.
- **Change the activity to support the student.** If a student is struggling with an activity consider how it can be tailored to their strengths and abilities. For example, if a writing task is difficult for a student to complete, encourage them to use an alternate way to demonstrate their skill. For example by verbally providing an answer.
- **Remove classroom clutter.** De-cluttering the environment can allow for easy movement for all students with reduced motor skills.

Use music to improve motor skills

- **Use music to get children moving.** Music can improve movement ability in children. Try "moving to the beat" of an instrument in a safe environment, or letting students adapt how they play an instrument to better fit with their abilities
- **Combine movement with music.** Consider activities where students are asked to combine fine motor movements to the rhythm of a song or rhyme. For example, choose a song or rhyme, and ask children to rest their hands on their knees, one palm facing up and one down, while sitting on a chair. To the rhythm, ask them to raise their hands, rotate their hands so palms face the opposite way, and lower them to their knees. Repeat this for the whole song or rhyme.



Best practice tips

Consider seating position and duration.

- Some students might need extra help to support their posture. This may help with pain management, or tasks like handwriting. Bean bags or pillows may help. Consider talking with the student or professionals working with the student about the best seating position.

Consider where things are kept.

- Check that students can reach things on shelves, particularly for students who use wheelchairs or mobility aids. It may be helpful to have bookshelves at different heights, or to tape down paper during craft activities to avoid it slipping away from the student.

Provide plenty of opportunities to practise.

- Children with motor challenges may need to practise motor skills many times. Give the child plenty of time to practise with different tasks and different materials so they can learn to use that skill in other situations and settings.

Encourage students to learn at their own pace:

- When teaching physical education skills, encourage students to have a go at activities in safe environments. This might mean focusing on just having a go at first rather than learning a specific technique.

Consider pairing the student with a buddy.

- This could be helpful both in and out of the classroom. For example, the student's buddy can assist with note taking if needed. Include a range of different children as buddies, rather than the same one or two children each time.

Build students' fine motor skills.

- Get students to hold and use heavier objects, knead dough or playdough, and encourage them to use zippers and tie shoelaces themselves.



Other considerations

Homework and assessments

- Some children who find handwriting challenging may need additional time to complete assessments that are handwritten. Consider whether some assessments can be tailored for a child's strengths (e.g. oral assessment, online or computer-based assessments).
- Similarly, consider whether homework could include some activities that are not handwriting based. Fun activities that build fine motor skills (such as using playdough to spell out words) allow for a child's educational goals and fine motor skills to be developed in an engaging way.

Toileting/hygiene

- Talk with a child's family and support team about any additional strategies or equipment (e.g. adapted toilet seat, step ladder, railings) that may support the child.

Transitions

- A child with fine and gross motor challenges may find moving from primary school to another setting (i.e. another primary school or secondary school) challenging.
- It may be helpful to teach and practice organisation and homework skills, and time- and self-management skills.
- For more information about supporting students with disabilities when transitioning across education settings, access AllPlay Learn's [transition page](#).
- For children transitioning to primary school access AllPlay Learn's Story A school day, and for children transitioning to secondary school access Access AllPlay Learn's story How to be Organised

Other co-occurring conditions

- Children with motor skills challenges often experience other co-occurring disorders such as [cerebral palsy](#), [physical disability](#), [intellectual disability](#), [autism](#) or [blind or low vision](#).



Relevant resources

Visit our [resources page](#) for a range of resources that can help to create inclusive education environments for children with disabilities and developmental challenges. Some particularly relevant resources for children with motor issues include:

- Strengths and abilities communication checklist
- Character strengths poster (A3)