

Hand Dominance – Under 5's

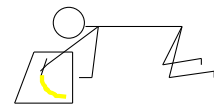
What is it? Hand dominance is the preference of one hand to perform fine and gross motor tasks, such as writing, cutting or catching and throwing a ball. When one hand is consistently used more than the other hand, and is more skilled at tasks than the other hand. This is also referred to as hand preference. Children typically develop hand dominance between the age of 2 and 4 years.

The dominant hand and the non-dominant hand plays a significant role in completing tasks. Both hands working together is known as bilateral coordination and is important in many school-related tasks.

Why is it important? : Some people are good at using both hands (ambidextrous) but it is much better for a child to develop strength and dexterity in one hand. This will help them to develop accuracy and speed with fine motor tasks, particularly handwriting. It is far better to have a specialised hand to do the job well than two less developed hands.

How you can help:

- Offer your child plenty of every day opportunities to participate in developing their hand skills. When working on establishing dominance, encourage daily activities that require continued use of one hand without direction as to which hand to use. Place materials at the child's midline (directly in front of the middle of their trunk), and allow the child to choose and switch hand freely during these activities and other activities;
- Ensure your child is sitting with a comfortable and supported posture (e.g. feet on the floor, and elbows resting on the table at a 90 degree angle) or is standing up at a vertical surface.
- Minimise emphasis on dominant and non-dominant hand and allow child to freely alternate hand use.
- After several weeks of daily undirected hand activity, watch for one hand to be chosen more frequently for one handed activities or used more consistently for grasping for writing implements, scissors etc.
- When you note preference for one hand emerges, focus on developing the dominant and assisting roles for the two hands.



The following is a list of games and activities to help develop hand dominance:

- Large scribbling on the chalkboard or drawing on mural paper that is on a easel or taped to the wall or floor
- Hammering wood that is clamped to a surface
- Pounding a large ball or clay with one hand until it is flat
- Swinging a ball on a string above head
- Throwing small balls or beanbags with one hand.

Examples or activities include when dominant hand is chosen:

- Drawing, writing, or painting with one hand, stabilising paper with the other.
- Cutting with one hand, stabilising and turning paper with the other.
- Using one hand to build towers with blocks, stabilising and helping to keep blocks lined up with the other.
- Tracing or scribbling over templates, holding writing implement with one hand while stabilising paper with the other.
- Opening containers, such as jars or plastic containers with lids that require stabilisation with one hand and action with other.