# Fine Motor at Home

Play-based activities for little hands








**Ages 3 to 5** **40 activities**

Pincer grasp · Finger strength · Finger isolation

# What's inside

The activities are grouped by the main hand skill each one builds, and most build more than one. Start anywhere your child is curious.

## Pincer grasp

Picking up small things between the thumb and pointer finger.


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# Before you start

Every activity in this book comes from OTPlan and uses everyday things like bottle caps, playdough, foil and clothespins. There's no wrong way to play. Follow your child's lead and keep it fun.

## How to use this book

**Keep it short.** Most activities take 5 to 15 minutes.

**Let your child choose.** Their interest is the best guide.

**Adjust as you go.** Every page has an easier and a harder version.

**Stop while it's still fun.** You can always come back another day.

**Check off the days you play** in the tracker on page 45. If your child sees a therapist, bring the book along.

## How each page works

**Time and place**
How long it takes, setup time, and where to play

**Skills it builds**
The hand skills the activity works on

**You'll need**
Everyday materials to gather first

**How to play**
Step-by-step directions

**Easier and harder**
Ways to adjust to your child

**What to notice**
Things to watch for and share with your child's therapist

## Things you'll use most

- [ ] Masking tape
- [ ] Pipe cleaners
- [ ] Buttons
- [ ] Bottles
- [ ] Glue
- [ ] Markers
- [ ] Playdough
- [ ] Paper cups
- [ ] Clothespins
- [ ] Pom-poms
- [ ] Cardboard
- [ ] Beads
- [ ] Aluminum foil
- [ ] Plastic containers
- [ ] Scissors (grown-up setup)

Each activity page lists everything it needs.

**Safety.** Stay close during play. Small items like beads, buttons, beans, rice, sequins and pom-poms can be choking hazards. A few setups use scissors or a sharp pencil. Those steps are for a grown-up.

These activities are for home practice and don't replace the guidance of a licensed therapist.

# Tiny Bottle Cap Pies

**15 to 20 minutes** **Setup: 2 minutes** **At a table**



## Skills it builds

Finger Isolation | Pincer Grasp | Tactile Perception

## You'll need

- [ ] Bottle Cap
- [ ] Playdough
- [ ] Rice
- [ ] Tray

## Why it helps

This activity helps your child practice the pincer grasp. This is the way we pick up small things using the thumb and the pointer finger. Picking up tiny grains of rice builds the small muscles in the hand. These muscles are used for big jobs like zipping a jacket or holding a pencil. Pressing the rice into the dough also gives their fingers helpful feedback about how hard they are pushing. It is a fun and calm way to work on coordination while being creative.

> **Choking risk:** bottle caps can be a choking hazard. Stay within arm's reach, and keep them away from children who still put things in their mouths. The easier or harder versions also use dried beans.

## How to play

1. Before play, place several plastic bottle caps and a handful of dry rice on a tray.
2. Let your child choose a color of playdough and pull off a small piece.
3. Show your child how to press the dough into a bottle cap until it is flat like a pie.
4. Invite your child to use their thumb and pointer finger to pick up one grain of rice at a time.
5. Have them press each grain of rice into the playdough to decorate their tiny pie.
6. Your child can make patterns or fill the whole top with rice sprinkles.
7. When the pie is finished, they can use a finger to poke the rice out or pull the dough out to start again.

## Make it easier

- Use large dry beans instead of rice to make picking them up easier.
- Put a large lump of playdough on the tray instead of using the small caps.
- Help your child roll the dough into a ball before they press it down.

## Make it harder

- Ask your child to make a specific pattern like a circle or a square with the rice.
- Use a timer to see how many grains of rice they can add in one minute.
- Have them use their non-dominant hand to pick up the rice.

**In everyday life.** This skill helps your child pick up small bits of food. It also helps them manage tiny buttons on their clothes. This is the foundation for holding a crayon comfortably as they start to draw.

## What to notice

Notice if your child uses the tips of their fingers or the sides of their fingers.

See if they prefer to use one hand over the other for the tiny pieces.

Notice if they seem frustrated with the small rice and offer larger beans if needed.

**Safety.** Supervise your child closely to make sure they do not put the rice or bottle caps in their mouth. Dry rice can be a choking risk for young children. These pretend pies can look like real food. Tell your child before play that the pies are for playing, not eating.

**We played** M T W T F S S

# Floating Ball Sponge Rescue

**10 to 15 minutes** **Setup: 5 minutes** **At a table**



## Skills it builds

Bilateral Hand Use · Eye-Hand Coordination · Finger Strength

## You'll need

- [ ] Bowl
- [ ] Ping Pong Ball
- [ ] Plastic Container
- [ ] Sponge
- [ ] Water

## Why it helps

This playful activity works on hand strength and eye-hand coordination. Squeezing a heavy sponge builds the little hand muscles needed for scissors and writing. Watching the ball rise also keeps their eyes focused and tracking!

> **Choking risk:** ping pong balls can be a choking hazard. Stay within arm's reach, and keep them away from children who still put things in their mouths.

## How to play

1. Set a tall, clear plastic container with a wide opening on a flat table. A tall plastic drinking cup works well.
2. Drop the ping pong ball into the empty container.
3. Fill a large bowl with cool water and place it right next to the container.
4. Have your child dunk the sponge into the bowl to soak up the water.
5. Show your child how to hold the container steady with the helper hand and squeeze the wet sponge over the opening with the other hand.
6. Keep soaking and squeezing, and watch the ping pong ball float higher and higher.
7. When the ball reaches the top, let your child pluck it out with the fingertips and start again.

## Make it easier

- Pour a little water into the container first so the ball starts floating sooner.
- Use a small, thin sponge that is easier to squeeze with one hand.
- Squeeze the sponge with both hands together, then switch to one hand when ready.

## Make it harder

- Use a taller, narrower container so your child has to aim the drips carefully.
- Squeeze with the helper hand only for one full rescue.
- Count the squeezes it takes, then try again with a smaller sponge and compare.

**In everyday life.** Squeezing water out of a sponge builds the grip strength kids use to wring out a washcloth in the bath, squeeze a shampoo bottle, and wipe the table after a meal.

## What to notice

Notice how your child squeezes. A full-hand squeeze gets more water out than a light press with the fingertips.

Watch whether the helper hand keeps the container still while the other hand squeezes, or whether both hands drift together.

If cold water bothers your child, use warm water, or offer a dish glove for the squeezing hand.

**Safety.** Stay right beside your child during water play, even with a small amount of water, and wipe up spills so no one slips. Use a plastic container, not glass.

**We played** M T W T F S S

# Sequin Push Maze

**10 to 15 minutes** **Setup: 5 minutes** **At a table**



## Skills it builds

Distal Finger Control | Finger Isolation | Visual Motor

## You'll need

- [ ] Foam Sheets
- [ ] Markers
- [ ] Sequins

## Why it helps

This simple activity helps children develop excellent precision and control in their fingertips. We call this distal finger control. It is vital for skills like managing small buttons, holding a fork correctly, and controlling a pencil with endurance. By using only one finger to push a small, light sequin across the slightly resistant foam, your child practices isolated finger movements and visual tracking. Following the winding path also encourages focus and motor planning skills.

> **Choking risk:** sequins can be a choking hazard. Stay within arm's reach, and keep them away from children who still put things in their mouths.

## How to play

1. Use a marker to draw a winding path or simple maze onto the foam sheet.
2. Place the foam sheet flat on the table. Ask your child to hold the sheet steady with their helper hand.
3. Put a small pile of colorful sequins at the starting point of the maze.
4. Challenge your child to pick up one sequin using a strong pincer grasp.
5. Switch grip: Use only the tip of their pointer finger to gently push the sequin along the drawn line to the finish.
6. The child must use steady pressure and friction to keep the sequin moving without flying off the foam.

## Make it easier

- Draw a wide, straight road first, then add one gentle curve once the sequin stays on track.
- Use a large flat button instead of a sequin so it is easier to see and steer.
- Pick up the sequin by pressing a damp fingertip on it if pinching it off the foam is tricky.

## Make it harder

- Draw a maze with dead ends so your child has to plan the route before pushing.
- Push with the middle finger or ring finger, or switch to the pointer finger of the other hand.
- Set a sand timer and see how far the sequin travels without leaving the line.

**In everyday life.** Moving one fingertip with control while the other fingers stay quiet is the same skill kids use to press buttons on a remote, tap a tablet screen, and point to words while reading.

## What to notice

Notice whether the other fingers curl in while the pointer finger pushes, or whether they spread out and drag along the foam.

Watch how much pressure your child uses. Too light and the finger slides over the sequin, too hard and it flips or sticks.

If the scratchy edge of a sequin bothers your child's fingertip, let them push it with the eraser end of a pencil instead.

**Safety.** Sequins are very small objects. Close adult supervision is required throughout the activity as they pose a significant choking hazard for children under five.

**We played** M T W T F S S

# 8-week play tracker

Check a box on each day you play. Write down the activity your child liked best.

| Week | M | T | W | T | F | S | S | Favorite activity |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | | | | | | | | |
| 2 | | | | | | | | |
| 3 | | | | | | | | |
| 4 | | | | | | | | |
| 5 | | | | | | | | |
| 6 | | | | | | | | |
| 7 | | | | | | | | |
| 8 | | | | | | | | |

## Activities to play again

# Notes for your child's therapist

Jot down what you notice as you play. The **What to notice** box on each activity page can help. Bring this page to your child's next visit.

## What my child enjoyed

Which activities did they ask for again?

## What seemed tricky

Where did they get stuck or want help?

## Changes I noticed

Anything that got easier over the weeks?

## Questions I want to ask