Occupational Therapy Strategies and Interventions
Separation of the Two Sides of the Hand
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Do you have a child or student who has difficulty with fine motor tasks? Maybe he holds a pencil with all 5 fingers or cuts by placing all his fingers into the loops of the scissors? Children who have difficulty with fine motor tasks may need to work on separating the two sides of the hand: the skill side and the power side.

Separation of the Two Sides of the Hand
The “skill side” refers to the side of the hand with the thumb, index and middle fingers. The pinky and ring fingers comprise the “power side” of the hand. The goal is for the “power side” to provide stability while the “skill side” moves freely to manipulate objects. A tripod grasp, for example, uses the “skill side” of the hand to manipulate a pencil, while the pinky and ring fingers are tucked inside the palm, providing stability to the grasp. Your student’s hands may not be strong enough to differentiate between these two sides and manipulate small items efficiently. We want to strengthen hands to allow for the power side of the hand to stabilize appropriately.

Quick Tip
You want to encourage the thumb, index and middle fingers to do the manipulation. To encourage this, have your student place a pom-pom (or cotton ball, bunched up tissue, candy, etc.) in the palm and tell them to hide it with their pinky and ring fingers. This will give the “power side” a job while the “skill side” manipulates. Then try these activities:

Create a Bin of Clothes Pins, Tweezers, Various Tongs with Beans or Rice so you can try these activities in class:
- **Free Choice Activity with Bin:** Work on strengthening the skill side of the hand by using various utensils such as tweezers, large and mini tongs, clothespins and strawberry pickers. Search for “buried treasure” items hidden in a bin of beans, corn, rice, etc. by picking them up with the utensils. Remind the students to tuck in their pinky and ring fingers in the palm while they use the tongs.
- **Math Practice:** Incorporate tongs and beans into counting or other math activities.
- **Social Skills Development:** Have your child use the various tongs to pick up items and place them into containers, making it a race to see who can get all of their items in the cup first! Games such as Bed Bugs and Operation use tweezers. Or you can incorporate tongs into games such as Don't Spill the Beans or Hi Ho Cherry-O.

**Mini Spray Bottle:**
- Spray water onto plants or use the spray bottle to clean surfaces (i.e. mirrors, windows, chalkboard) requiring whole arm movements to strengthen and stabilize shoulders.
- Draw your favorite pictures on the ground with sidewalk chalk, then “erase” it with water by using a mini spray bottle to squirt water onto the drawings. Make sure the “skill side” of the hand squeezes the trigger, while the “power side” holds the bottle steady.
- Spread shaving cream all around the (shower) wall/desk and use the squirt bottle to wash it away.
- Add paint or food coloring to the water then attach a large paper to a fence or wall outside and create some spray art.

**Push Pins:** Use large pushpins to create pictures on thick cardboard, Styrofoam blocks, or small carpet squares. Place a drawing on top of the board, then poke small holes along the lines with the pushpin. When you remove the drawing, you will have the picture below made of small holes from the pushpin.

**Small Objects:** Picking up small objects with one hand and putting them into container with a small opening (such as a yogurt container with a slit cut in the lid). You can use tic-tacs, pasta, coins, buttons, red hots, paper clips, erasers, buttons, etc. Have child hold several items in his palm and one by one place them in the bottle, not dropping the objects. This requires moving item to the fingertips while maintaining a grasp on the others in his palm. Try this in reverse – pick up one item at a time and see how many you can translate into your palm without dropping any.

**Stickers:** Pulling off and placing small stickers to make a picture out of the stickers, get plain dot stickers and make up your own dot-to-dot. Make specific marks on the paper where the stickers need to be placed to “cover up” the mark. This requires more precision and accuracy.

**Pegboard activities:** You can get small pegs/board at a school supply store and use them to copy peg patterns or design your own pictures.

**Lacing cards or “stitching”**: Make a large paper pattern then cut out a shape and punch holes along the edge. Then lace the paper patterns together. Leave an opening to stuff the shape with polyester fiberfill, crumpled papers, or cotton balls and finish stitching it closed.

**Games:** Other games such as Light Bright, Hi Ho Cherry-O, Battleship, Cootie Bugs, Ants in the Pants, etc., are great for helping children to develop their fine motor skills.