



12–36 Months

Physical/Health: Fine Motor Development¹

WHEN INTRODUCED: Block 1

BEHAVIORS TO OBSERVE

- Purposefully moves fingers and/or hands
- Uses fingers and/or hand(s) to hold and/or manipulate an object(s)

EXAMPLES OF OBSERVATION OPPORTUNITIES

This *Guide* uses 12–24 months and 24–36 months age designations in relation to when specific types of emerging skills often can be observed. The age parameters are not firm; the timing of developmental pathways and milestones varies considerably across children.

Behaviors may be observed during a care routine, playtime, or guided activity, including a book sharing. Pertinent ELM activities (Physical/Health) are cited in parentheses. The activities pertain to the age group indicated in the example. Examples without an age identification pertain to any age of toddler (12–36 months).

Purposefully moves fingers and/or hands²

- manipulates fingers as part of a finger play or other guided activity
 - 12–24 months: opens and closes fingers (Block 1, Option 2), wiggles fingers (Block 1, Option 3)
 - 24–36 months: wiggles thumbs (Block 1, Option 2)
- manipulates hands as part of a song or other guided activity
 - 12–24 months: moves hands up (Block 1, Options 1–3), touches or claps hands together (Block 1, Option 3; Block 5, Options 1–3)
 - 24–36 months: claps hands (Block 1, Options 1 and 2; Block 5, Option 1)

Uses fingers and/or hand(s) to hold and/or manipulate an object(s)

- opens a book, turns a page of a book, and/or holds book in hands
- scribbles and/or makes marks with a tool
 - 12–24 months: a paintbrush or chubby marker (Block 3, Options 1–3)
 - 24–36 months: a chubby crayon (Block 4, Options 1 and 2) and/or marker (Block 4, Option 3)



- picks up and manipulates an object(s) during a guided activity or playtime
 - 12–24 months: during a snack or mealtime, uses fingers to pick up a food item or uses hand(s) to hold and drink from a bottle or cup
 - 24–36 months: feels and manipulates sensory materials, including sand and shells (Block 3, Options 1 and 2; Block 9, Option 2); pours water from containers (Block 3, Option 3; Block 9, Options 1 and 3); manipulates a ball of play dough (Block 6, Options 1–3)
- starts and stops finger and/or hand movement of an object(s) as requested
 - 12–24 months: shaker (Block 9, Options 1–3)
 - 24–36 months: bell (Block 7, Options 1–3)

EXAMPLES OF FOLLOW-UP LEARNING SUPPORTS

Reintroduce

Purposefully moves fingers and/or hands

- 12–24 months: Offer the finger plays in Block 1, Options 2 and 3 and the hand-clapping song in Block 5, Option 1 as one-to-one experiences.
 - Begin the Block 1, Option 2 activity with a demonstration and description of open fingers and closed fingers. Explain we are pretending our fingers are stars. Invite the toddler to join you in moving his/her fingers. Repeat the demonstration with the first part of the “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star” song. Provide an enthusiastic description of the toddler’s efforts. Option 3 (“Itsy Bitsy Spider”) is more challenging because it involves movement of both fingers and hands. Provide a demonstration and description in a lighthearted approach. Remember that most toddlers cannot be expected to alternate thumb and index finger movements.
 - Consider opening Block 5, Option 1 by demonstrating hand claps while singing part of the “Clap Your Hands” song. Then invite the toddler to clap his/her hands with you as you sing the song again. Support bringing hands together at or near the midline.
- 24–36 months: Offer the finger and hand actions in Block 1, Option 2 as a one-to-one experience. Emphasize the first two actions (clap our hands, thumb actions) and consider omitting the third action (walking and clapping around the mats), especially if you anticipate the third action will distract the toddler from focusing on finger and hand movements.



Uses fingers and/or hand(s) to hold and/or manipulate an object(s)

- Provide one-to-one experiences in making marks with a paintbrush, marker, or crayon.
 - 12–24 months: Each of the three options in Block 3 involves a different tool. Select an option(s) that involves a tool of interest to the toddler. Provide a demonstration, if appropriate. Positively acknowledge a toddler's approach, including the use of a fist-type hold. Describe the toddler's actions and draw attention to the marks, including scribbles or dots, that the toddler makes.
 - 24–36 months: Repeat the open-ended coloring activity suggested in Block 4, Option 1. Offer 2–3 chubby crayons in contrasting colors. Provide a demonstration, if appropriate. Emphasize the toddler's marks on the paper without directing the coloring.
- Offer one-to-one experiences in picking up and manipulating an object(s) of interest.
 - 12–24 months: Describe the toddler's efforts to pick up and move a food item, bottle, or cup during a snack or mealtime. Emphasize the toddler's use of fingers and hand(s).
 - 24–36 months: Select an object of interest to the toddler, such as a dry material (Block 3, Options 1 and 2), water (Block 3, Option 3), or ball of play dough (Block 6, Option 1). Offer a demonstration of holding or manipulating the item, if appropriate. Describe the toddler's efforts, especially the use of fingers and hand(s).
- Provide one-to-one experiences in starting and stopping finger and/or hand movement of an object.
 - 12–24 months: Repeat Block 9, Option 1 with a shaker, beginning with a demonstration of starting and stopping (with two hands) the shaking action, if appropriate. Omit the suggested use of moving your body while shaking the toy if you anticipate this will draw attention away from manipulating the shaker.
 - 24–36 months: If the toddler has no or limited prior experience in manipulating a bell, offer a guided play opportunity as suggested in the Be Prepared section of Block 7, Option 1. Consider offering Block 7, Option 1 with the activity plan's suggested words rather than a song to guide the toddler's start and stop actions with the bell.

Reinforce

Purposefully moves fingers and/or hands

- 12–24 months: Adapt activities that involve finger and hand movements
 - Invite the toddler to manipulate one or two hand puppets while you sing "Clap Your Hands" (Block 5, Option 2). Encourage bringing hands together at or near the midline.
 - Invite the toddler to demonstrate how to make and move a pretend fish with his/her two hands. Repeat with variations, such as a small fish and a big fish (Block 5, Option 3).
 - Encourage the toddler to lead the finger and hand actions in a nursery rhyme, such as "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star" (Block 1, Option 2) and "Itsy Bitsy Spider" (Block 1, Option 3).



- Encourage the toddler to show how to wash hands while you sing a handwashing song (Block 13, Option 1).
- Repeat activities that combine hand clapping with other body movements, such as clapping and smiling (Block 7, Option 1), clapping hands together slowly and stomping feet quickly (Block 7, Option 2), or clapping hands together and waving hands as part of a song (Block 13, Option 2).
- 24–36 months: Repeat hand-clapping activities combined with another body movement
 - Clapping hands together while walking around a circle of carpet squares or place mats (Block 1, Option 2).
 - Tapping our toes with our fingers or tapping our shoulder or arm with our opposite hand (Block 11, Option 2).

Uses fingers and/or hand(s) to hold and/or manipulate an object(s)

- Provide experiences in making marks with different types of tools
 - 12–24 months: dot markers (Block 11, Option 2), chubby crayons (Block 11, Option 3), paintbrushes (Block 3, Option 1; Block 11, Option 1; Block 25, Option 3), and hand(s) and fingers with paint (Block 25, Options 1 and 2).
 - 24–36 months: chubby crayons while exploring different amounts of hand pressure (Block 4, Option 2) and making circles (Block 4, Option 3), sensory materials (Block 9, Options 1–3), and using fingers, hand(s), and tools with balls of play dough (Block 6, Options 1 and 2; Block 23, Options 1 and 2).
- Provide practice in picking up and manipulating small objects
 - 12–24 months: buttons (Block 15, Options 1 and 2), puzzles pieces (Block 18, Options 1 and 2), peg toys (Block 21, Options 1 and 2), balls of different sizes and textures with both hands (Block 17, Option 1), sensory tubes with both hands (Block 20, Option 1), and toy cars (Block 23, Options 1–3).
 - 24–36 months: bear cutouts and/or dolls (Block 8, Options 1–3), beads with both hands (Block 14, Option 1), links with both hands (Block 14, Option 2), puzzle pieces (Block 16, Options 1 and 2), tongs (Block 20, Options 1 and 2; Block 24, Option 2), and small toy animals (Block 24, Option 1); small balls in a water table, with opportunities to cross the midline (Block 21, Option 2).
- Offer practice in starting and stopping finger or hand movement of an object, as requested
 - 12–24 months: a bell (Block 19, Options 1–3)
 - 24–36 months: streamers (Block 5, Option 2), scarves (Block 5, Option 3), bells (Block 7, Options 1–3), and shakers (Block 17, Options 1–3)



EXAMPLES OF PORTFOLIO ENTRIES

Theresa's skill in turning the pages of a book is changing rapidly. She seemed hesitant when I first invited her to turn a page during an individualized book sharing. Now she is eager to turn a page and is careful with her fingers to make sure she turns one page only. I plan to encourage her to both hold the book and turn the pages. This arrangement will give her important responsibility in managing a book we look at together. Carefully turning the pages of a book is important practice for developing fine motor skills.

Jacob enjoys clapping his hands together! This past week he participated in two activities that involved a mix of hand clapping and other actions. In one of the activities, we waved our hands and clapped our hands together to a song. Jacob listened carefully to the words of the song so he would know what to do. I will continue to provide activities that support Jacob's motor development.

Endnotes

- 1 The categories and behaviors to observe are informed by the following source: Bricker, D., Capt, B., & Pretti-Frontczak, K. (2002). *Assessment, evaluation, and programming system for infants and children, 2nd ed., Vol. 2: Test, birth to three years and three to six years*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.
- 2 No object is involved in the finger and/or hand movements.