

HELPING MY BABY USE THEIR HANDS TO PLAY

Why is hand play important?

- Babies learn a lot by using their hands!
- Babies already take their hands to their mouth in the womb and they like to continue this after birth.
- Babies like to bring their hands together and touch their clothes.
- It's an important stage of development when babies can hold toys and take them to their mouth.
- Babies learn by looking at what they are holding.
- Young children use their hands to point to what they want – a very important skill! Have Fun!

How to help

Help your baby to look towards toys and their hands.



Encourage your baby to touch and reach for toys.



How can I help my baby use their hands?

To be able to use their hands babies need to know they have them!

- Try and keep your baby's hands uncovered.
- Touch, kiss and massage your baby's hands.
- Babies' hands are typically fisted in the first few months after birth, allow your baby to grasp your finger/thumb.
- When your baby is upset, talking to them and bringing their hands together at their chest will often help them soothe.
- Sing hand songs such as Round and Round the Garden goes the Teddy Bear!

Once you notice your baby looking at their hands it's a good time to help them try to touch and swipe at toys.

- Offer an interesting toy close to your baby's hands where they can easily see it and attract their attention to it – use a baby gym or hold a toy at your baby's chest level so it's easy to see and reach for.
- Babies like to touch your face and hair.
 - when lying on their back babies begin to lift their legs and touch their knees with their hands.

Encourage your baby to hold toys or safe objects - before babies can reach out to grasp, they will hold objects placed in their hands.

- Give your baby toys and objects which are easy to hold - baby rings, small light rattles, plastic spoons, small plastic slinkies, etc.
- Don't expect your baby to hold a toy for long – it takes time to learn.
- When your baby drops the toy you can put it back in their other hand. Make sure you help baby practice using both hands. Babies at this stage won't be able to hold a toy in each hand at the same time – this comes later.
- When babies take toys to their mouth, they are learning important skills.
- Listen for the different sounds your baby makes when they have a toy in their mouth

SAFETY NOTE: Always supervise your baby during these activities.



If your baby is swiping at toys and holding toys placed in their hands, they are ready to start reaching and grasping for toys.

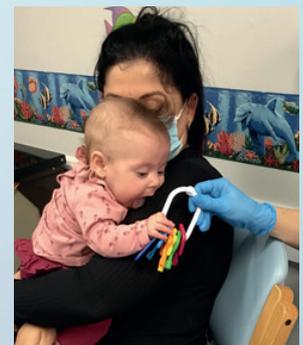
- Place easy to hold toys or objects close to your baby's hands in a position that is easy for them to grasp – such as when they are lying on their back and you place the toy just above chest height. Show your baby a toy they are interested in - allow time for your baby move their hand towards the toy.
- Tap the toy lightly on the back of your baby's hand to encourage them to open their hand to grasp.
- Once your baby is grasping objects close to their hands you can put toys a little further away to encourage reaching further.
- Always choose toys that are safe for babies to grasp.
- If your baby is eating solids, you can help them hold finger foods.



Help your baby use their hands in different positions. Make sure your baby is well supported until they can hold their head up and sit by themselves.

Positions to help babies develop their hand skills:

- Right from birth babies will begin to use their hands whilst you are holding them in your arms.
- If your baby needs help to bring their hands together in the middle or their mouth when lying on their back try using a V cushion or towel rolls behind their shoulders.
- Use a baby gym when your baby begins to reach up when lying on their back.
- When your baby is ready for sitting in a high chair placing toys on the high chair tray is another great way to practice hand skills.
- If your baby has good head control but needs help to sit you could use a baby bath (without water) with rolled up towels for trunk support.



In their first year of life, babies grasp objects using both hands equally. If you notice your baby prefers to use the same hand most of the time speak to your GP or health visitor.

Young children also use their hands to communicate by reaching out and using gestures. Look out for your baby's communication cues and when your baby is ready encourage waving, clapping and pointing.