

Getting Ready for School



A practical guide to help your child develop some skills that will be useful for going to school.

This pack was developed by Children and Young People's Occupational Therapy Service, NHS Borders



Getting Ready for School

A child moving from nursery to primary 1 is such an exciting time. We have put together this pack of information to give parents some ideas of things that may be useful to work on with your child so that everyone can feel more confident about the move to primary one.

Children develop skills at different rates and some children will be more keen than others to carry out new activities and practice new skills. Children learn and develop building blocks for development through play and therefore play is an essential part of a child's life. Children will often choose activities that they like and know they are good at, and will not spend much time on activities that are more challenging to them or that they don't enjoy as much. This can result in some children having strengths in some areas and needing more practice in other areas.

The lead up to a child going into primary 1 is a great time to carry out activities and practice skills that will help when they do eventually go to school. Functional skills such as dressing, using cutlery, going to the toilet, drawing/pre-writing are useful skills to practice as well as foundational skills such as gross motor and fine motor activities. Carrying out additional practice and doing activities that will assist in the development of specific skills will benefit in the child's future learning and participation.

This booklet is designed to highlight the skills that would be useful to practice, and gives some fun ideas on how to do this. There is also a checklist/sticker chart highlighting specific skills. Your child may find this motivating if they earn a reward.

It is important to note that this is only a guide of things that would be useful to practice in order to prepare your child for primary 1. Teachers will be aware that some children will be more able than others at this stage, and will of course assist your child where necessary. It is however useful for teachers if children are given the opportunity and encouragement to practice skills prior to entering primary 1. There is no need to worry about reading and writing letters and numbers as this will be taught at the appropriate stage. The skills that are most important at a pre-school stage are those that provide the 'building blocks' or 'foundations' for academic learning, and those that encourage more independence with functional tasks.

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- What is normal development – age 3, 4, and 5
- Tips for developing dressing skills
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- Gross motor skills
- Deep pressure techniques
- Getting ready for school sticker chart



What is normal development?

It is important to emphasise that children develop at very different rates, particularly in their early years, however there are general milestones that you can use as a guide to normal development. The table below outlines some of these milestones.

Age	Posture and large movements	Fine motor and vision	Social behaviour and play
3 years	Walks upstairs with alternating feet and downstairs two feet to one step. Climbs on apparatus with agility. Appreciates size and movements of own body in relation to objects and space. Rides tricycle (steering round wide corners). Throw ball overhand and catch large ball.	Threads beads. Holds pencil in preferred hand (starting to use a more refined pencil grasp). Copies circle, straight line and starts to try a + Cuts with scissors and enjoys painting (primitive 'pictures').	Participates in dressing (ie., can pull pants and trousers up and down). Eats with a fork and spoon.
4 years	Walks up and downstairs in adult fashion. Proficient in climbing apparatus. Beginning to hop on one foot. Able to jump with feet together. Increased skill in ball games (throwing, catching, bouncing, kicking, bat and ball games).	Threads small beads (to make necklace). Able to touch thumb to tip of each finger independently (slowly). Copies circles and crosses, diagonal Draws a man with head, legs, trunk (usually arms and fingers). Draws a recognisable house.	Eats skilfully with spoon and fork. Brushes teeth. Able to dress and undress except from laces, ties and back buttons.
5 years	Able to walk along a narrow line. Active and skilful in climbing, sliding and swinging. Skips on alternate feet. Is able to stand on one leg (balance). Plays a variety of ball games with good ability.	Copies square, triangle (at 5 ½ years). Draws a recognisable man with head, trunk, legs, arms and features. Draws a house with door, windows and roof. Colours pictures neatly, staying within the lines.	Uses a knife and fork competently. Dresses and undresses independently.

The above information was taken from: Sheridan M. D. (1975) *From Birth to Five Years: Children's Developmental Milestones* Routledge

The following pages give you some ideas of how you can use naturally arising opportunities to develop a child's motor co-ordination skills. You do not need access to expensive equipment. You can be inventive and use toys/equipment already in your home and the local community in a variety of ways in order to develop different types of motor co-ordination.

Ready for school activity ideas

Tips for developing dressing skills

When children learn how to dress themselves it is a huge accomplishment. Independent dressing is a skill that needs to be taught and practiced.

Things to consider:

- Introduce dressing by using dressing toys, dress up costumes and imaginative play.
- Encourage the child to handle clothes. They can help to hang out clothes, or sort clothes into colours and types.
- Find a routine that suits you and your child. If weekday mornings are busy, it may be easier to practice at bedtimes or at the weekends.
- Allow your child to choose their own clothes, and lay them out the night before in the correct sequence.
- Start with undressing, as this is easier and can be done later in the day as part of the bedtime routine.
- Ideally, they should be seated on a chair or a stool where they can put their feet flat on the floor. If the child is quite small, using the bottom step on a set of stairs may be easier.
- Talk through dressing, naming items and describing what you are doing.
- Start small and move up. Initially, the child should try putting on socks, or pulling up trousers. Use larger items of clothing to make it easier, i.e. a size bigger.
- Consider using a chart with photos of instructions broken down step by step.
- Place a large mirror in front of the child when dressing so they can see what they are doing.
- If a child refuses to dress themselves, you could use a reward chart system to encourage participation and ultimately independence
- Adapt clothing to make it easier for your child at school, i.e. elastic waistbands, Velcro shoes, elastic laces, larger polo shirts or toggles on zips
- If the child has one side of the body weaker or tighter than the other, dress that side first. If undressing, remove the weaker/tighter side last.



Try the following method:

Try teaching dressing using '**backward chaining**'.

- Backward chaining means that a task of dressing is broken into steps.
- An adult provides assistance throughout several steps until the child can complete the last steps independently.
- For example – socks:
 - The adult places the sock over the child's toes (step 1), then over their heel (step 2) and encourages them to pull the sock up their leg (step 3)
 - Once they are able to pull the sock up on their own (step 3), encourage them to pull the sock over their heel and up (step 2 and 3)
 - Finally, they will pull the sock over their toes and heel and up their leg (step 1, 2 and 3)



Fine Motor Skills

We use our hands on a daily basis for a variety of activities. The way in which a child uses their hands needs to be appropriate to each task. Development of fine motor skills can improve the way a child manipulates things in daily life.

Things to consider:

- **Grasp:** using a pincer grasp (thumb and forefinger) to pick up small things. Development of a pincer grasp later assists with holding a pencil, holding utensils, doing buttons and zips and using scissors



In-hand manipulation: refers to the ability to move and position objects within one hand without the assistance of the other hand.

- **Bilateral function (using two hands together):** the ability to use both hands together to do the same thing, as a support in an activity or each hand doing something different
- **Hand strength:** activities used to strengthen the small muscles of the hand

Try the following activities:

- **Pincer grasp:**
 - Playing tiddly winks games, closing ziplock bags, peeling stickers, doing buttons
- **In-hand manipulation:**
 - Making patterns with pegboard and pegs
 - “squirreling” coins in the palm of hand (hold 4-5 coins in one hand and post in a money box one at a time);
 - picking 5 small beads up using one hand;
 - connect 4 game: hold several chips at a time within the palm while placing chips in a slot;
 - pegging clothes pegs on a washing line (this also helps with hand strength)
 - opening toothpaste tubes
- **Bilateral function:**
 - threading beads to make necklaces
 - construction games (lego, duplo)
 - sewing
 - making chains with paperclips
 - playdough games (various cookie cutters and tools available in shops)
- **Hand strength:**
 - squeezing water bottles;
 - rolling out playdough;
 - using tweezers to move small items from one bowl to another;
 - punching holes in paper with punch;
 - popping bubblewrap with thumb and index finger

Recommended guidance:

- Try use at least 1-2 fine motor activities each day before doing any pencil tasks
- Make the activities fun!!

Pre-Writing Skills

Things to consider:

- Writing is a **complex** motor task which involves many different skills including fine motor skills, eye-hand coordination, body posture, motor planning and visual skills.
- **Body posture:** ensure your child is sitting with their feet firmly on the floor, bottom back against the chair, knees and hips at 90 degrees



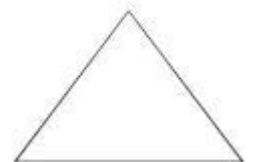
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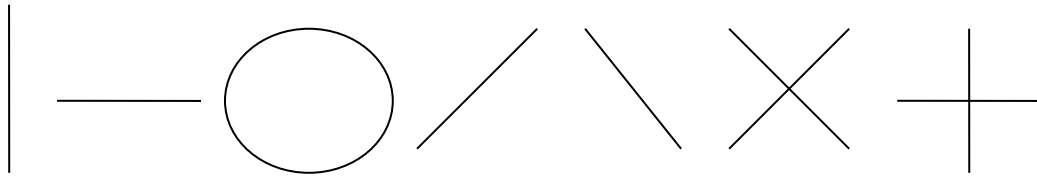
- Playdough, putty
- Lacing cards, bead threading, peg boards, tweezers activities
- Craft activities – cutting and sticking
- Try using a variety of vertical and horizontal angles, such as writing on a blackboard, using large pieces of paper on the floor
- Use a sensory approach to develop pre-writing skills, such as writing in sand, shower gel, paint, using chalkboard
- If your child has an awkward pencil grasp try using a thicker pencil
- Colouring books, which encourage pencil control by staying within the lines
- Tracing around templates
- Encourage smooth movements – encourage child to trace through mazes etc, without stopping or going backwards.
- To control pressure – place several sheets of carbon paper and plain paper underneath writing sheet. Have the child press heavily or lightly.
- Encourage your child to pick up a pencil/crayon as often as possible
- There are several Ipad apps available which encourage development of pre-writing skills such as Hairy Letters and Dexteria
- Most importantly, have fun!!

Recommended guidance:

Between the age of 4 – 5 ½ years a child should be able to copy the shapes below, starting from the left.

This is an important developmental stage in the process of developing letter formation.



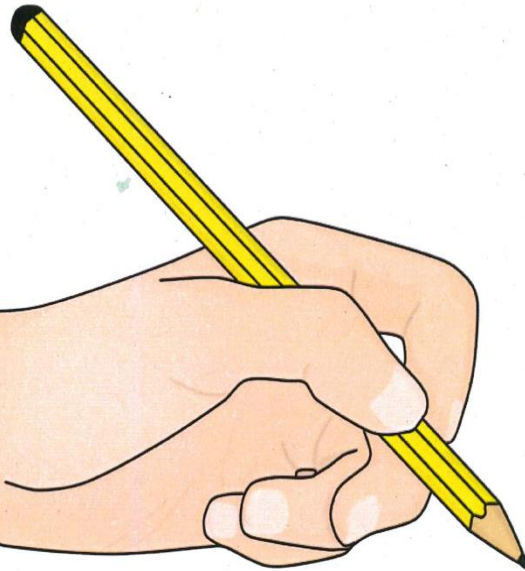


Over the page is a small selection of pre-handwriting worksheets for your child to try. This type of worksheet encourages pencil control, and awareness of working from left to right which is the direction we read and write in.

Hold your pencil correctly!



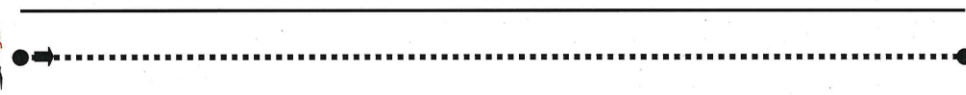
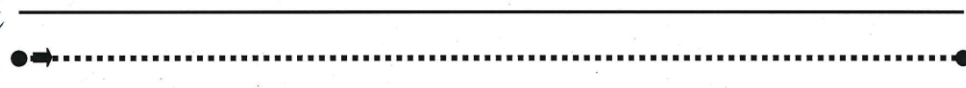
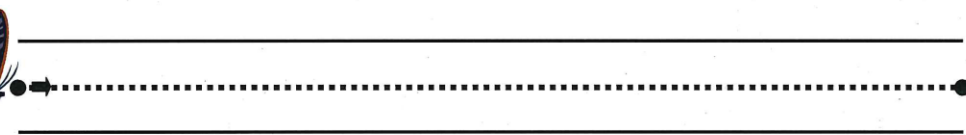
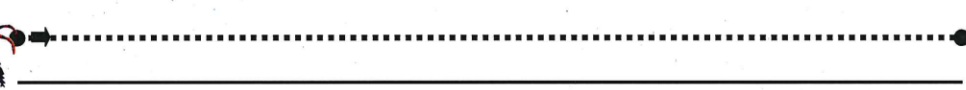
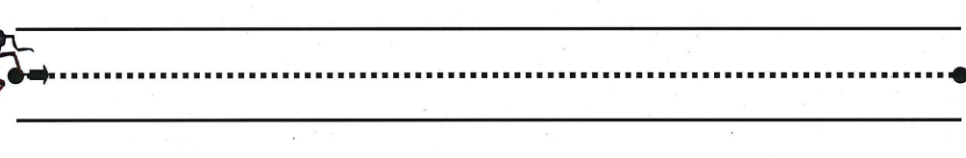
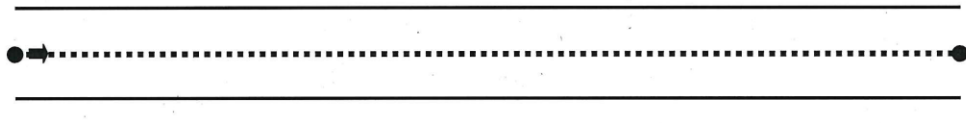
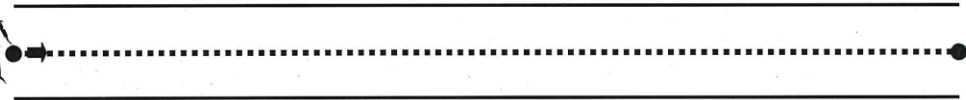
Hold your pencil correctly!



Eye-hand Coordination

Name: _____ Date: _____

Draw a line in the path, from left to right.

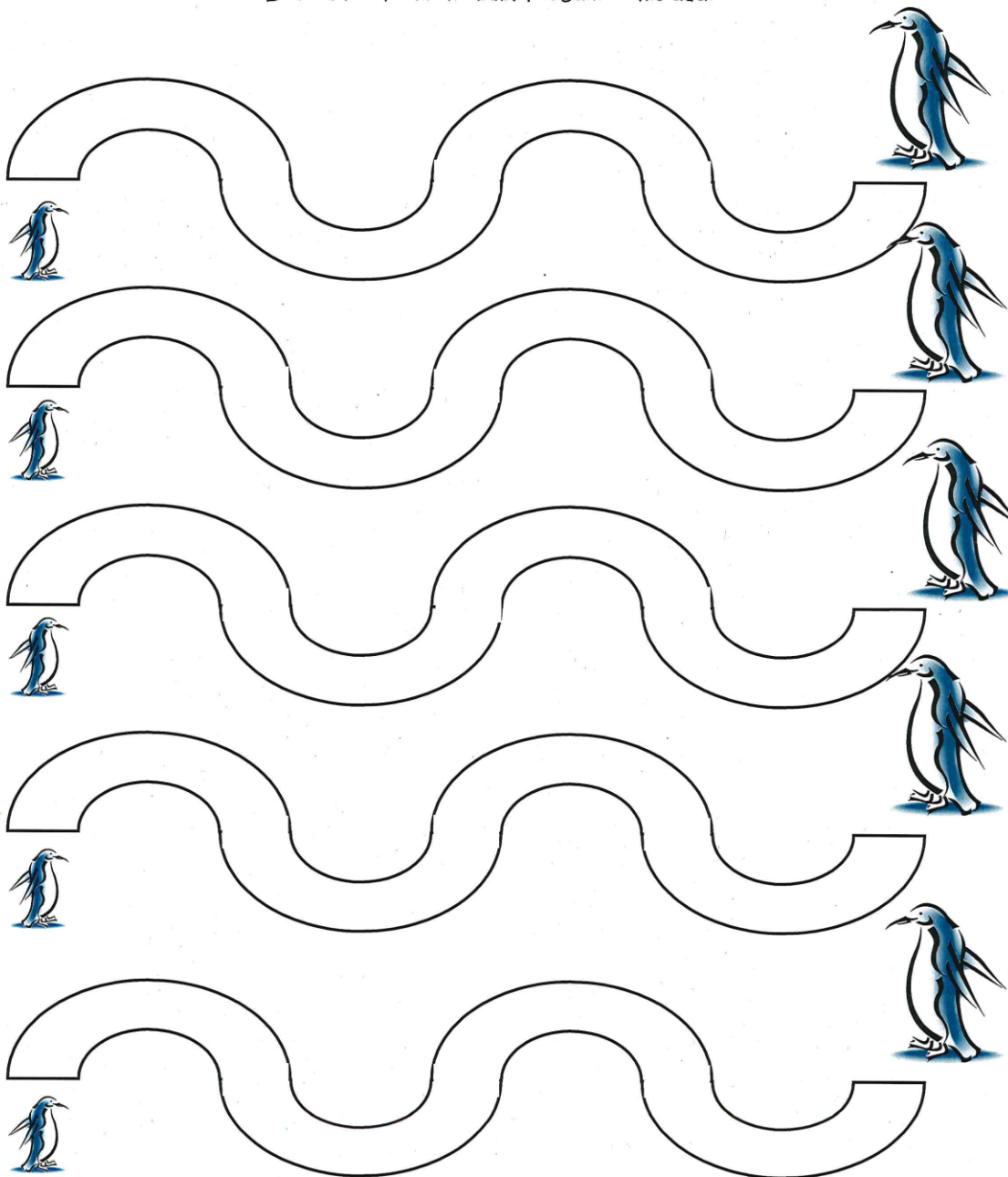


Eye-hand Coordination

Name: _____

Date: _____

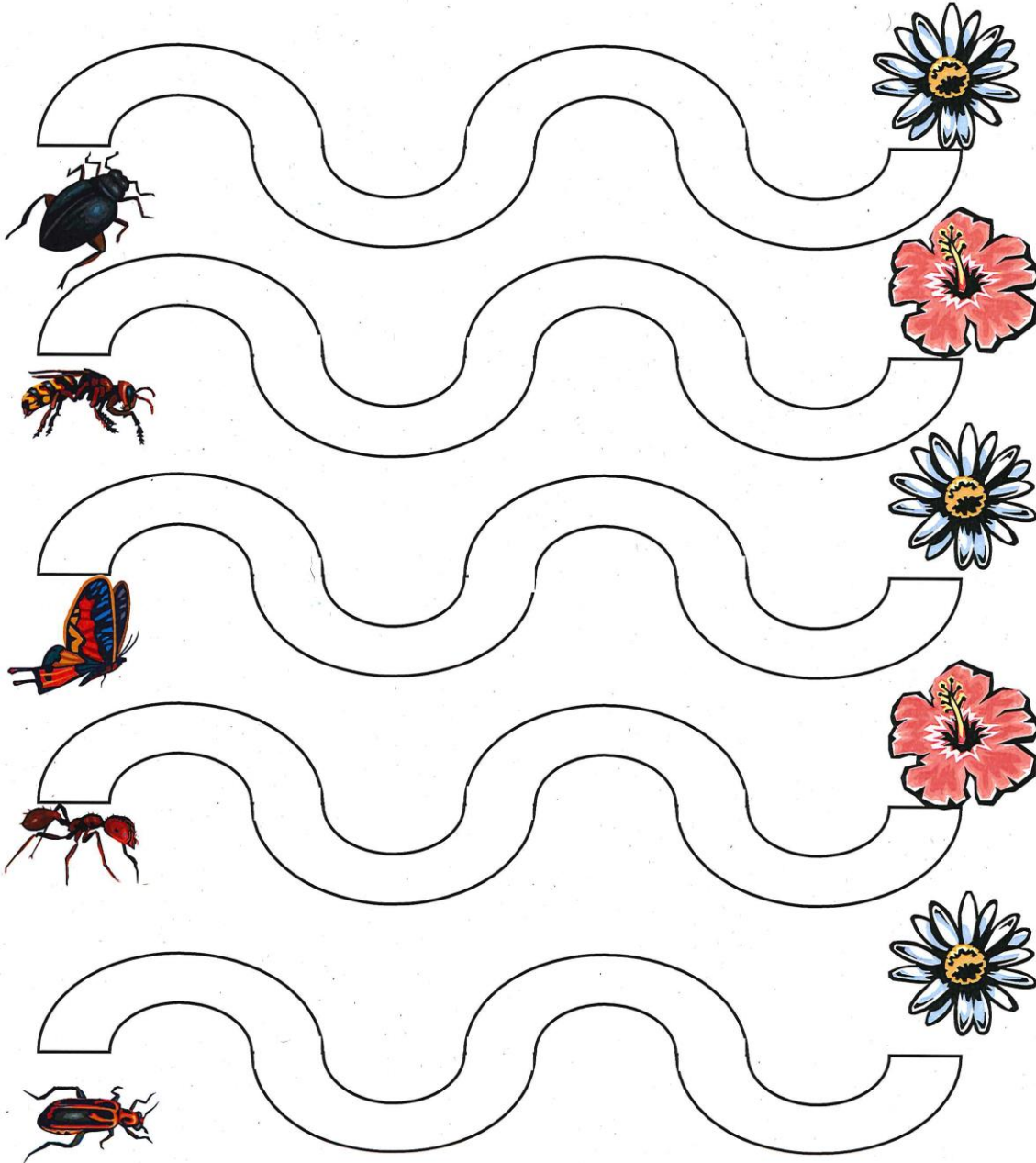
Draw a line from the baby penguin to his dad.



Eye-hand Coordination

Name: _____ Date: _____

Draw a line from the insect to the flower.

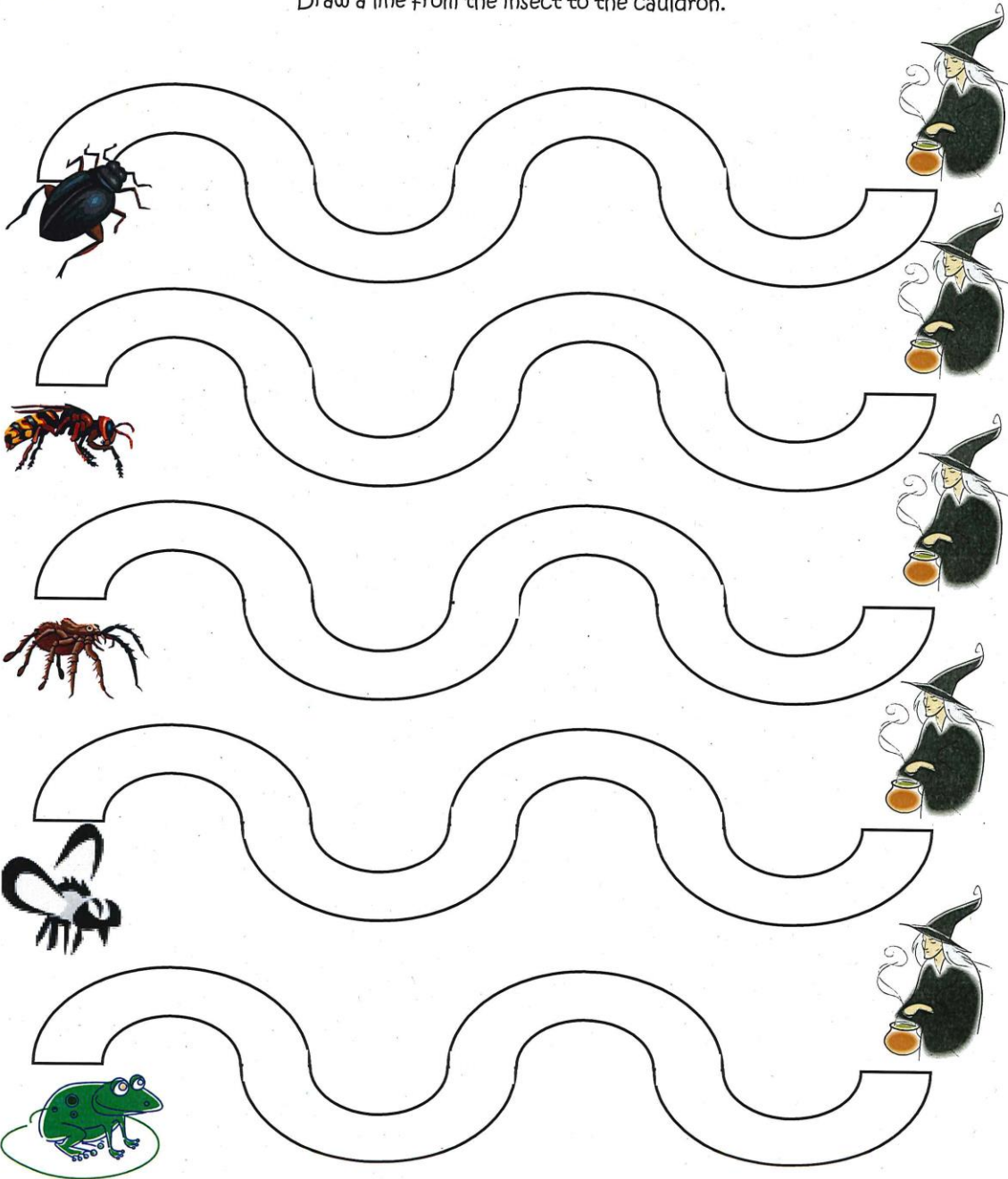


Eye-hand Coordination

Name: _____

Date: _____

Draw a line from the insect to the cauldron.

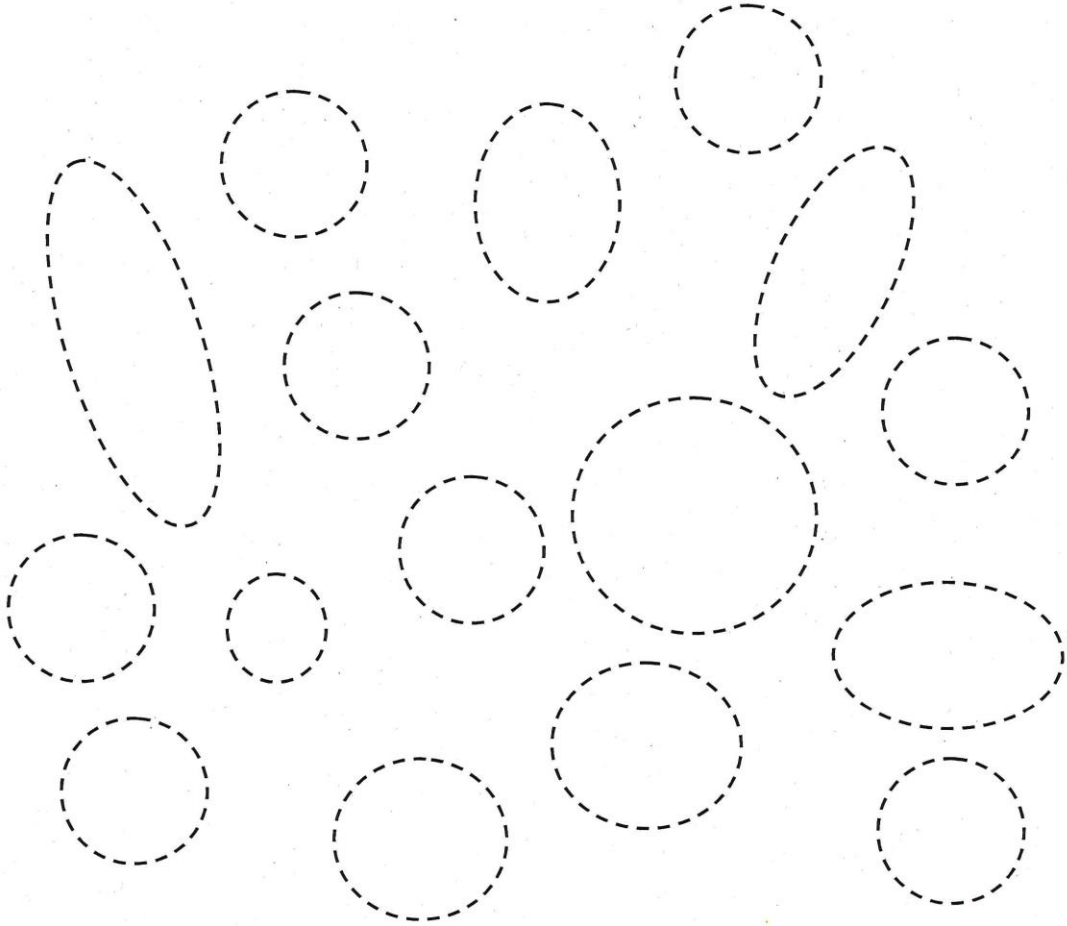


Eye-hand Coordination

Name: _____

Date: _____

Outline each bubble.



Using cutlery

Things to consider:

- **Sitting position:** Is your child able to sit at the table with both feet firmly planted on the floor? Is the plate directly in front of them or is it slipping to the side? When sitting your feet should always be firmly supported.
- **Utensils:** Make sure you have the right cutlery for the items you are cutting.
- **Size of cutlery:** It can sometimes be difficult for young children to obtain a firm grasp on standard cutlery due to its size and their small hands. Starting to learn with smaller sized cutlery (If your child is still struggling there are alternative options available which you can discuss with your therapist).
- **Observe how your child holds cutlery:** Their hands should be pointing down towards the plate. Visually demonstrate how to position your index finger on top of the knife and fork in order to increase the force required when cutting.
- **Hand dominance:** If your child is right handed then they should hold the knife in their right hand. If your child is left handed allow them to choose which hand to hold their knife in and identify which feels most comfortable for them.

Tips:

- Practise makes perfect! Use a fun activity for example cutting through playdough, cookie dough or cake mix etc.
- Allow your child to learn one step at a time:
 1. Piercing – Using the fork to stab playdough balls
 2. Cutting motion – Moving the knife backwards and forwards
 3. Co-ordinating the use of the knife and fork together
- Place your hands over your child's when cutting so your child can feel the necessary force and movement required to cut food.
- Use softer foods like eggs, vegetables, fish or sausages to practise cutting as this will be easier to manage and will help increase their confidence.
- Ask your child to use both utensils to cut one item on their plate and build up the use of cutlery gradually as their confidence and skill increases.



Ball skills

Ball skills help children develop body control and strength, and supports development of hand-eye coordination. To begin with use a fairly large soft ball and gradually decrease the size as the child becomes more confident and proficient.



Things to consider:

- Child needs to be alert with their eyes on the ball
- Child needs to have their hands ready for catching
- Child needs to be balanced: practice can start with child on the floor, then move to sitting on a chair and finally in standing
- When in standing, knees need to be slightly bent to allow for movement
- Encourage playing with balls from different angles, i.e. hitting suspended balloons, catching balls from the front/left/right

Try the following activities:

- **Rolling:**
 - roll a ball back and forth between you and your child
 - with the child kneeling on the floor get them to roll a ball into a goal
 - from standing roll a ball into a goal
 - play skittles
- **Bouncing:**
 - bounce the ball with two hands and catch it with two hands
 - bounce the ball with one hand, dominant hand first
 - bounce a ball against a wall and try to catch it
- **Hitting:** can use a bat or hands
 - hit a beachball
 - hit a balloon with alternate hands
- **Catching:**
 - start with catching and popping bubbles
 - catch a bounced ball from kneeling, sitting and standing
 - use a variety of tools i.e. beanbags, large light balls, small tennis balls
- **Throwing:** practice swinging arms for underarm throw
 - throw beanbag into a large box, gradually decreasing size of target
 - throw a ball in the air and catch
- **Kicking:**
 - kick the ball into a large goal – increase challenge by moving goal further away
 - kick a ball at skittles
- Play Swing-ball



Developing scissor skills

Cutting is a complex task that requires a stable and controlled grasp, the use of both hands and hand strength.

Prior to beginning cutting tasks:

- Fine motor activities that use manipulation (small items), hand strength (squeezing, playdough) and both hands together (tearing paper, threading, building) assist with development of cutting skills (a lot of which are part of the fine motor activities diary)
- Ensure the child has an appropriate pair of scissors for their hand size, dominance and ability (there are special scissors for left hand use).
- There are 2 stages to developing scissor skills, and each need to be taught separately:
 - Practice opening and closing the scissors first, with just one hand. Encourage the child to look at the scissor blades and say “open and close” as their hand moves the scissors.
 - Once the child has learnt how to operate scissors then they are ready to learn how to cut paper



Try the following activities:

The following table outlines the stage development of cutting skills for a child:

Stage	Activity	Activity
Stage 1	Basic snipping	Try cutting sausages made from play dough, plasticine or blue-tac.
Stage 2	Cardboard snipping	Snipping across strips of card approximately 1cm wide. As accuracy improves, move onto larger width strips of card i.e. 2cm, 3cm, etc until the child is able to combine opening and closing the scissors with moving them forward.
Stage 3	Paper snipping	Only once the child is able to snip cardboard
Stage 4	Paper cutting	Punch a series of holes in paper or use punched edge of computer paper and ask child to cut through holes. Progress onto thick solid straight lines, which the child must cut in half.
Stage 5	Textured cutting	Try cutting various fabric and textures, cereal boxes, string, sandpaper, scraps, straw, fabric.
Stage 6	Shaped line cutting	Start with lines which are slightly curvy. Then try cutting very curved lines, zig-zags, square, triangle, circle, etc.
Stage 7	Jigsaw	Draw thick, straight lines across a picture torn from a magazine. Ask the child to cut along all the lines to make a simple jigsaw.

Gross Motor Skills

Gross motor skills are those which require whole body movement and which involve the large muscles of the body to perform everyday functions, such as standing, walking, running, and sitting upright.

Participation in gross motor play develops the following:

- Core strength (tummy muscles, back muscles, muscles that support our shoulders and hips)
- Fluency of movement
- Hand-eye coordination
- Motor control
- Bilateral coordination (using both sides of the body together)

Development of the above helps with sitting upright in a chair, dressing, riding a bike, stabilising a pencil and outdoor play.

Try the following activities:

- **4 point kneeling (hands and knees):** lift one hand off the floor and hold for 5-10 seconds; lift one leg off the floor and hold; lift arm and leg on same side and hold; lift arm and leg on opposite sides and hold. When stable place a beanbag on their back.
- **Statue games**
- **Wobble cushion:** stand on a wobble cushion and hold on to the back of a chair; transfer weight from leg to leg; stand with support at pelvis; stand without any support
- **Tiptoes:** stand on tiptoes and hold position or run around like a ballet dancer
- **One leg balance:** stand on one leg, arms out to side and hold; change legs (This can be simplified by holding onto a chair for 10 seconds and progressing to standing without support)
- **Jumping:** jump over rope, keeping 2 feet together
- **Twister:** helps to learn about the left and right side of your body
- **Hop scotch:** start with jumping 2 feet together and then progress to 1 foot hop as balance improves
- **Crab walk:** sit on the floor with hands slightly behind and push your bottom up in the air so that your weight is supported by arms and legs and then try to walk forward, backward, sideways or 5 - 10 steps
- **Belly crawling:** crawl along the floor using a commando style; add obstacles to crawl around
- **Wheelbarrow walk:** work in pairs, holding partner at the ankles and practice walking forward and backward. Can pretend to be walking on the moon and collecting moon rocks (sweets) from one end of the room to the other
- **Cycling:** if having difficulty, advice can be given by therapist
- **Outdoor and in-door play area:** Where the child has the opportunity to play with balls, climb, balance and crawl
- **Be creative and have fun!!!**



Deep pressure techniques

These help to “waken up” the system in readiness for work and stimulate the postural muscles. These activities provide feedback to the muscles and sensory system. They do not all have to be completed, but one or two before concentrated periods of work may be useful and can become part of the routine before pencil tasks.

These can improve a child’s focus and attention to task.

- **Hand presses:** get the child to press their hands together firmly and hold for 5 seconds, release and repeat
- **Shoulder press:** An adult can press down firmly on the child’s shoulders, hold, release and repeat
- **Press down on head:** the child can lift their arms above their head, bring their hands together on top of their head and press down
- **Resistance exercise:** get your child to push firmly against your hands, release and repeat
- **Wall push ups:** Arm push-up against safe part of wall 3 times.
- **Table press-ups:** do 5 press ups at the table
- **Chair presses:** At seat, you can provide gentle pressure to spine by gently pushing down on seat to lift body up to take partial weight off seat and hold for 2-3 seconds.
- **Stretches:** Entire body stretch standing reaching to the sky while up on toes or on floor to get full stretch of arms, spine and legs with toes pointed.
- **Self hugs:** Stretch arms outward to full width stretch, then give self a big hug while pulling in toward the bellybutton afterward.

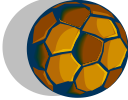


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Getting Ready for School Sticker Chart

Useful skills for a child to practice

Getting dressed on own buttons/zips/Velcro Putting on shoes	
Going to toilet on own Wiping Washing hands	
Eating and drinking on own Cutlery, using an open cup, opening a packet Wiping own face	
Fine motor - play dough, bead threading, Construction toys - e.g. Lego, jigsaws	
Practice with drawing Drawing with finger in sand or similar, finger painting, Colouring in/copying	
Recognising name (Capital letter at beginning and lower case for the rest) e.g. Harris	
Gross motor - running, jumping, balancing, ball skills, climbing	
Parents/carers reading to child frequently throughout the week	
Good sleep routine at night	

The above is a guide of things that would be useful to practice in order to prepare your child for primary 1. Teachers will be aware that some children will be more able than others at this stage, and will of course assist your child where necessary. It is however useful for teachers if children are given the opportunity to practice the above skills prior to entering primary 1. There is no need to worry about reading and writing letters and numbers as this will be taught at the appropriate stage. Teachers feel the skills that are most important at a pre-school stage are those that provide the 'building blocks' or 'foundations' for academic learning.

Use the above chart for stickers/ticks as these skills are practiced/achieved (some of which may already be achieved).

Acknowledgements

Child development table and activity ideas adapted from documentation originally developed by NHS Lanarkshire Children and Young People, Occupational Therapy

Movin mo Eye Hand coordination worksheets

Sparklebox – Teaching resources for Early Years and Primary School Teachers