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FREE RESOURCE

The Fine Motor Skills Checklist

The developmental milestone guide most parents only discover when it is urgent, and how to get ahead of it now.

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The invisible foundation most parents do not see until it is urgent

Fine motor skills are the small, precise movements of the hands and fingers. They are the foundation of writing, cutting, dressing, eating, and almost every task your child will be expected to do independently at school.

Fine motor delays are largely invisible until the moment they become obstacles. A child who struggles to hold a pencil correctly in their first year of school is the child whose fine motor development was below expectation at age four. And nobody noticed, because nobody was looking.

1 in 6

Australian children show some form of fine motor developmental delay by school entry.

Ages 3-5

The critical window for building foundational grip strength and hand-eye coordination for writing.

92%

Of fine motor skill development is driven by experience, not genetics. What children do with their hands matters enormously.

"The children who struggle most with writing in their first year of school are often the most capable children. They just never had the right experiences to build the foundations. Art changes that."

Valando Demetriou, Co-Founder, Mini Ivy Art Studio

What to expect, and what to watch for — Ages 2.5 to 4

These milestones are developmental guides, not deadlines or pass/fail criteria. Use them to understand the trajectory and identify where targeted practice would help most.

Age 2.5 to 3

Building the Basics

- Turns pages of a book one at a time
- Builds a tower of 6 to 8 blocks without toppling
- Holds a crayon with a whole-hand grasp; imitates vertical and horizontal lines
- Strings large beads onto a cord

Age 3 to 4

Precision Emerging

- Cuts paper with scissors (not in straight lines yet, and that is completely fine)
- Copies a circle and basic shapes from a model
- Three-finger tripod pencil grasp beginning to emerge naturally
- Buttons and unbuttons large buttons independently; strings small beads; begins using tweezers

WHAT TO NOTICE

At age 3, most children can hold a crayon but not control it precisely. By 4, that precision should be clearly emerging. If it is not, targeted play activities can close the gap quickly.

WHAT TO DO

Offer playdough, threading, tearing, and scissor play as regular free-choice activities. These four activities alone cover most of the foundational skill building for this age range.

Ages 4 to 6, and when to seek support

Age 4 to 5

Control Developing

- Cuts along a straight line with scissors consistently
- Copies letters: own name, simple words
- Tripod pencil grasp consistently present during drawing and writing tasks
- Manages zips, buttons, and simple fastenings independently in daily routines

Age 5 to 6

School Ready

- Cuts along curved lines and simple shapes with reasonable accuracy
- Writes own name and basic letters with consistent size and spacing
- Uses cutlery independently for most meals without assistance
- Hand dominance clearly and consistently established

WHEN TO SPEAK TO A PROFESSIONAL

If your child is significantly behind milestones across multiple areas at age 5 and above, speak to your GP and request an Occupational Therapy referral. Early OT support is highly effective and can significantly change a child's school experience from their very first week.

THE 18-MONTH WINDOW

Between ages 4 and 5.5, the brain's motor cortex is in a highly responsive period. Targeted creative activity during this window produces faster progress than the same activity would at age 7.

AT MINI IVY

Every session is designed to build fine motor foundations through guided art. Children aged 3 to 6 develop grip, coordination, and bilateral control through painting, sculpting, and construction.

10 activities that develop fine motor skills through creative experience

No specialist equipment needed. These activities build grip strength, hand-eye coordination, and bilateral coordination through play children actually want to do.

01

Playdough Strengthening

Rolling, pinching, pressing, and squeezing builds the intrinsic hand muscles essential for pencil grip.

02

Scissor Practice

Start with snipping fringe. Progress to straight lines, then curves. Bilateral coordination and hand strength combined.

03

Bead Threading

Progressively smaller beads on progressively thinner laces. Pincer grip and hand-eye coordination in one task.

04

Tearing and Collage

Tearing paper in a controlled direction is a deceptively sophisticated bilateral coordination task worth doing regularly.

05

Tweezers and Pom-Poms

Transfer pom-poms between containers using tweezers or tongs. Direct and measurable pincer grip development.

06

Watercolour Painting

Small brushes require precise grip and control. Varying brush size varies the challenge in a way children enjoy.

07

Finger Knitting

Looping yarn over individual fingers builds isolated finger movement, one of the more sophisticated fine motor skills.

08

Hole Punching

Punch holes in old cards and thread ribbon through them. Precise hand strength and positioning in one activity.

09

Dot-to-Dot Drawing

Drawing between two precise points requires the directional hand-eye control that directly underpins letter formation.

10

Peg Play

Clipping pegs to a box or hanging washing on a low line. The squeeze-and-place motion builds foundational pincer grip.

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Every session at Mini Ivy is building the foundations your child needs.

Fine motor development is embedded into every guided art experience at Mini Ivy, through painting, sculpting, collaging, and building. Our structured creative sessions are not just art. They are the physical and cognitive foundations your child will carry into school and beyond.

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