USING HANDS: typical development

Children develop at different rates in different spheres of development; this list shows the typical order of development of hand and body skills. The use of the hands develops within the overall basic motor pattern.

0 – 3 months: Child watches own hands moving. Swipes at hanging object, may hit it. Lying face down (prone) may lift head and chest, resting on forearms. On back (supine) lies straight with 4 limbs symmetrical. Supports own head when carried at 12 weeks. Limbs move independently in space, baby may seem surprised by own movements. Brings hands together.

3 – 6m: Reaches swiftly and accurately for objects, including own feet. Brings objects to mouth, usually two handed approach. Drops first object if given another. Cannot release objects voluntarily. Uses fingers and palm to hold. Explores objects with hands.

6 – 9m: Begins to take symmetrical crawling movements when lying prone. Rolls in both directions. Sits independently. When sitting, reaches out for things on either side of the body. Transfers objects from hand to hand. Kicks strongly with alternating leg movements.


15 – 18m: Squats and returns to stand, walks unaided, gets upstairs on hands and knees. Picks up small objects with finger and thumb, places large peg in hole. Can do large, simple shape inset puzzle. Builds tower of 3 bricks. Enjoys hammer bench toy.


27 – 33m: Attempts to use scissors. Stand on one foot momentarily. Can remember accurately. Builds tower of 8 bricks.

33 – 36 m: Catches large ball against chest with two hands. Kicks moving ball. Can put features on a pre-drawn face.


54 – 60m: Walks along a bench with good balance. Skips on alternate feet, moves rhythmically to music. Can stand on either foot for 10 seconds – can stand on one foot with arms folded. Can thread needle with large eye and make stitches. Tripod pencil grip, can copy letter. Drawings of human figure recognisable, has details like hair, ears. Can copy a pattern of bricks.

Sources: Mary Sheridan, Penelope Leach, Hertford Profile, Madeleine Portwood, Geoffrey Waldon, and thanks to Maggie Ellis, OT.