



Working with playing cards is a great way to develop hand skills! Holding and using cards is a bilateral (both hands) activity. Moving the cards around is great for hand dexterity. Play a variety of card games with your child, watch them improve their hand skills – and have family fun at the same time.

One great activity is flipping cards. Have your child flip and sort cards (see below for sorting technique) either into piles by color or suit, depending on ability. This activity can be done with many different types of cards, be creative! Use the following flipping technique when you play war with cards. The dollar store often has cute cards with favorite characters – have them sort the characters.

How to flip cards: Hold a deck of shuffled cards in non-dominant hand, face down. Use the dominant hand to flip cards over one at a time. Use the thumb to “pull” the card up, grasp card between fingers and thumb and FLIP card up to see it. This FLIPPING action requires wrist extension, an important fine motor skill component – particularly important in developing an efficient pencil grasp!

Holding a “hand” of cards can be challenging for small hands. Encourage them to hold them for some part of the time. Other adaptations is to “hold” the cards with something else, one idea I have read about is to cut slits in an upside egg carton to hold the cards upright. Another option is to attach two flat plastic lids (as from a margarine tub) together in the center (staple, brad, glue) and arrange cards between the layers.

Have fun playing cards AND working on fine motor skills!

BONUS: Games with dice are also great! Cupping, or arching, the hands to hold the dice is another very important hand skill that contributes to an efficient pencil grasp!

Karen Rogers, MA, OT/L