

Do Not Forcefully Change the Dominant Hand: Training Small Muscles the Right Way

Written by: Pang Chi Wah, Registered Educational Psychologist, New Horizons Development Centre



Many of us, or even those around us, may have been "left-handed" as children but were forcefully converted to "right-handed" by our parents for ease of teaching. In reality, which hand is dominant is determined by innate factors, and parents should not interfere. Instead, they can provide appropriate guidance and engage in various activities to strengthen the child's hand muscle development. If a child's small muscle development is inadequate, it can affect their learning interest and daily life performance.

About 10% of children do not have a clear dominant hand. Parents can try offering food or toys alternately from the left or right side to guide the child in grasping, which may help identify their dominant hand. Since the choice of which hand to use is determined by innate factors, parents should not attempt to change it.

Parents should actively provide sufficient small muscle activities to stimulate children's hand strength and dexterity. They can directly touch the child's palms back and forth and carefully touch each finger, or engage in a "pointing" activity using their own fingers corresponding to the child's fingers. Although the child may not understand, parents can mention the names of the fingers, like thumb and index finger, similar to commentary during a football match, helping the child become aware of their different fingers.



Parents can also make a fist and then extend different fingers, or start with an open palm and then curl different fingers. Initially, children cannot accurately control which finger moves or stays still, so parents can use fun games to engage them without forcing them to complete specific actions.

Parents can play games similar to "Little Ming, Little Ming," using their palms to clasp the child's small hands and create different rubbing motions. Initially, the child participates passively, but as they grow, they can become more actively involved.

Parents can also use their palms for many activities, the most common being guiding the child to clap their hands or wave and shake hands with others. During feeding time, parents can encourage the child to hold the milk bottle themselves, and later, ask them to grip it independently, allowing their small hands to develop the necessary strength.

Children need to eat every day, and they can interact with different types of utensils in their daily lives. Their small hands will explore how to manipulate forks, knives, and spoons, while bowls and plates of various sizes and weights will help them understand whether to use one hand or both. Parents can start with plastic small utensils for practice before moving on to regular family dinnerware.



Parents can also stimulate different hand movements through toys, such as pushing, pulling, building, threading, assembling, tossing, and throwing. By providing a variety of toys, parents can facilitate different types of small muscle activities. Lastly, stationery is essential for children to learn small muscle operations, and parents should provide age-appropriate stationery for them to try, such as crayons and erasers, to stimulate hand activity.