



## Hand Preference

### Introduction

Hand preference refers to the consistent favouring of one hand over the other for a skilled part of an activity. For example, when writing or drawing the preferred hand holds and uses the pencil whilst the other hand supports the paper. Some people refer to the preferred hand as the "dominant hand" or use the term "hand dominance".

A hand preference usually starts to develop between the ages of 2 to 4, however it is common at this stage for children to swap hands. Between the ages of 4 to 6 years a clear hand preference is usually established, although in some children it can take until they are 8 or 9 years old.



### Why is it important?

It is important to establish a firm hand dominance in order to complete higher level bilateral hand tasks. Bilateral coordination is the ability to coordinate the movements of the left and right sides of the body efficiently and smoothly. The term applies to both gross motor and fine motor activities. All daily activities require some level of both sides of the body working together such as walking, dressing, and play. The desired outcome is that the child is using one hand in a more skilled manner with the other hand assisting rather than having two low skilled hands.

### Establishing Preferred Hand

If your child does not use one hand as the preferred hand, do not choose or force the child. Instead, carefully observe your child whilst playing or doing everyday activities. Make a note of whether one hand is used more, or if one hand appears more skilled than the other. For example, observe your child drawing or writing; brushing his teeth or hair, eating and drinking.

Position toys or activities in front, and to the centre, of the child so that he can choose which hand to use rather than using the hand closest to the toy. For example, position pencils in front of your child when he is drawing so that he can choose which hand to hold the pencil with rather than using the hand closest to the pencil.



### Encouraging the use of the preferred hand

Once it is clear which hand your child prefers or demonstrates more skill with, it is important to encourage your child to consistently use this hand. Here are some ideas of activities':

- Drawing, colouring or writing.
- Cutting with scissors.
- Pasting with a glue stick or brush.
- Art and craft activities – ink stamps, stickers, card making, mask making, stencils, tracing.
- Playing card games.
- Playing musical instruments – recorder, violin, keyboard, xylophone, trumpet, guitar.
- Computer games.
- Tweezers, tongs

- Screwing lids on and off jars: screwing pipe fittings together, assembling nuts and bolts.
- Large Legos (Duplos): or other building type toys – one hand must hold and the other manipulates the pieces into position
- Pushing a car or train around a track: You can draw a pathway, or streets on a long piece of paper. As the child moves the car, he ends up crawling and naturally stabilizing his weight on his non dominant hand.

### **Everyday activities**

Encourage your child to do these activities with the preferred hand and use the other hand to hold and position the object or toy (if required):

- Cleaning teeth with a toothbrush.
- Brushing hair with a hair brush.
- Holding sandwiches, biscuits, lollipops
- Using a fork and spoon when eating.
- Using a knife to cut up food or butter bread.
- Washing or drying the dishes.
- Bath-time activities – washing herself or a toy with a flannel, pouring water into containers, winding up bath toys.
- Opening drink bottles and lunch boxes.
- Removing lids from yoghurt containers, Vegemite or jam jars.
- Zipping up school bags and clothing.
- Sharpening pencils
- Opening doors