

Word Wonders Activity 18: Laundry Literacy

CHILDREN ARE LEARNING TO...

- Strengthen fine motor (finger/hand) skills (18 to 48 months)
- Develop hand-eye coordination (18 to 48 months)

ACTIVITY SUMMARY:

In this activity, children will explore a variety of fine motor skill activities designed to strengthen their finger/hand muscles and fine-tune hand-eye coordination. Children need strong hands and fingers to hold and manipulate writing utensils so while these activities don't *involve* writing, they are *supporting* the underlying physical skills children need to begin holding a writing tool in the proper manner.

MATERIALS NEEDED:

Book: *Mrs. McNosh Hangs Up Her Wash* by Sarah Weeks

For Activity 1 (Engage):

For children 18 to 30 months old:

- Water table
- 16-20 small objects for children to wash—small toy cars, plastic dolls, plastic blocks, toy plates/silverware, doll clothes, or baby socks, etc.
- 2 baskets
- 4 scrub brushes, [similar to these](#)
- 4 clean sponges (cut 2 regular sponges in half)
- 4 small (infant-sized) washcloths
- 2 plastic bins for wet objects
- Optional: One smock per child

For children 30 to 48 months old:

- **Handout 1:** Clothesline Items
- Set of wooden, “pinch” style clothespins—about 20 per child, [similar to these](#)
- Thick yarn or cord, about 12 feet (two 6-foot lengths)
- Painter’s tape, duct tape, or other sturdy tape
- Optional: Manila folders, glue/stapler (if you want to make images sturdier for reuse)

For Activity 2 (Expand):

- 4 baskets (1 per child)
- About 400 cotton balls (2 bags), can substitute 1.5-inch pom-poms
- Metal spoons, one per child
- Small tongs, one per child, [similar to these](#)—if using with 30 to 48 month olds
- Muffin tin, one per child (or 1 muffin tin for every two children if you want to run this activity in pairs)

PREPARATION:**For Activity 1 (Engage):****For children 18 to 30 months old:**

- Place half the items to be washed in each basket.
- Prepare water table if needed.
- Place the brushes, sponges, and wash clothes near the water table where children can easily access them.
- Place the plastic bins (for wet, washed items) within close reach of the water table to avoid dripping across the floor.
- Have smocks handy, if using.

For children 30 to 48 months old:

- Make two copies of **Handout 1** and cut out these items. If desired, glue them to a manila folder to make them sturdier for re-use. Put a set of 10 images in each basket.
- Before leading the activity, decide where you will hang the clotheslines. **Right before leading the activity**, make two clotheslines. Securely tape or tie two 6-foot lengths of cord or thick yarn along an open wall. (Two children will work at each clothesline.) You could also tape the cord to a bookshelf or toy shelf, if that is easier. Make sure the clothesline is at eye level for children.
- Separate the clothespins into two baskets, with about 20-30 clothespins in each basket.
- **When the activity is complete, immediately remove the clothesline and place the cords out of children's reach.**

For Activity 2 (Expand):

- Separate the cotton balls into the baskets. Keep any extra cotton balls in the bag, but close by in case children run out.
- Where the children will be working, set up each child's space with a muffin tin, bowl of cotton balls, a spoon, and tongs (if using). You can also have children work in pairs, each sharing a muffin tin but with their own set of balls, spoon, and tongs.

Activity Instructions

EXPLORE

Share the following book and extension activity with children as an opportunity to help children work on fine motor skills needed for writing.

Book: *Mrs. McNosh Hangs Up Her Wash* by Sarah Weeks

As You Read:

- **Introduce the book and its key ideas.** Explain: *in this story, silly Mrs. McNosh hangs up clothing on the line...and all kinds of other silly things too.* You might pause to ask children: *Does a newspaper get washed and dried? Nooooo, that's silly!*
- **Define new words and phrases** Some children may have never seen a clothesline before. Explain that a clothesline is a long rope where we hang clothes outside to dry in the sun. New vocabulary could include stockings (long, soft socks that cover your feet and legs) and roasting (cooking food over a fire or in the oven)."
- **Prompt children to repeat key phrases and pause for children to fill-in-the-blank.** This book contains many funny rhymes. Once children are familiar with the story, you can pause and point to the picture of the final rhyme and encourage them to fill it in: "She hangs up the stockings, she hangs up the shoes, she wrings out the paper and hangs up the ___ (*pause and point to the newspaper in the illustration*) news."
- **Use pictures and text to support observation and reasoning.** Invite children to examine the illustrations to find and describe details. Can they locate the yellow bird on each page or name objects not mentioned in the text (garbage can, vacuum, and rake)? Ask children: *Why do you think Mrs. McNosh is hanging her wet clothes on the line? What will happen when they hang in the sun?*
- **Encourage prediction.** Pause at surprising and silly moments and ask the children to make predictions. Why do they think the mailman is running away? Is it perhaps because he's worried Mrs. McNosh will hang him on the clothesline? When Mrs. McNosh hangs up the sleeping bats, ask children: *Is this the right place for bats to sleep? Noooo! It's silly!* You can also explain that bats *like* to sleep upside-down, but they prefer to sleep in a dark place like a cave. Before you read the part about Mrs. McNosh hanging her roast turkey on the line, point to the picture and look surprised. Ask: *What is Mrs. McNosh hanging up next???*
- **Identify and explore emotions.** Take opportunities to highlight emotions shown in pictures and text. When the mailman is running away, how might he feel (scared or worried)? *Have you ever felt scared or worried? When?* In the final illustration, what do the children think Mrs. McNosh is feeling at the end (proud, happy, relaxed, comfortable, tired, or...?). *When do they feel happy?*

ENGAGE – ACTIVITY 1

Introduce the activity:

For children 18 to 30 months old:

We are going to pretend to be Mrs. McNosh and wash some clothes and other silly things today!

Show children the water table you have set up with washcloths, brushes and sponges. Talk about/demonstrate how to use each item. Encourage children to pick up the different tools as you talk about them.

Explain: *We will wash things in the water table using the brushes, sponges, and washcloths. Then, when you are done, you can put each thing you've washed on this drying tray to dry.* (Show children where you've set up the bin for wet items.)

Give each pair of children a shared basket of items to wash. Supervise as they work, assisting with using the washing tools and prompting them to place washed items in the bin. For fabric or clothing items, model/ prompt children to squeeze and twist the items (this requires finger/hand strength). If children run out of items to wash, you can put “clean” items back in the “to be washed” basket.

Narrate as children are washing: Label the objects they are cleaning (doll, car, block, sock, etc.) and prompt children to repeat these new words. You can also use a variety of action words to describe their work: *scrub, rub, wash, clean, twist, wring, sponge, wipe, brush, swab*. Using a variety of words to describe an action helps children add to their vocabulary.

For children 30 to 48 months old:

We are going to pretend to be Mrs. McNosh and use these clothespins (show children) to hang clothes and other silly things on our clothesline here (show children)!

Explain: *We are going to work in pairs to hang up laundry using these clothespins. Has anyone ever seen a clothespin before? Let's discover how these tools work. You SQUEEZE with your fingers here (demonstrate) and the clothespin opens. If you let go, it closes. Let's all try.*

Distribute a clothespin to each child and help them learn how this tool works. Let them practice opening and closing the clothespin before moving on to the next part of the activity.

Show children the prepared items in the basket: *Here is a basket of clothing and some other silly things to hang on our clothesline. You and your partner will have a chance to hang all of your items here on our line, just like Mrs. McNosh does.*

Demonstrate: Pick up an item from a basket. Show children how you hold it in one hand, pinch the open end of the clothespin with the other, and clip the item on the line. Return it to the basket when you're done.

Pair children up, give them a basket, and assign them to work at one of the clotheslines.

Supervise as children work: Model or demonstrate how to use the clothespin again if needed. If children do not have the finger strength yet to squeeze the clothespin open, you can give them a piece of painter's tape to tape the item to the line or the wall.

When children have hung the items in their basket: Walk with them along the clothesline and for each item, chant: *Mrs. McNosh hung up her wash and she hung up a...* (insert name of object). Give children a chance to participate in the rhyme and pause so they can fill in the blank.

Summarize: *Today, we pretended to be Mrs. McNosh and washed and hung up some silly laundry! We used our strong hands and fingers to do the washing just like Mrs. McNosh!*

EXPAND – ACTIVITY 2

Introduce: *We're going to pretend we work at a bake shop! That's called a bakery. You say bakery. We are going to pretend to bake some yummy cakes!*

WHAT CAN YOU DO IF SOME CHILDREN ARE READY FOR CLOTHESPINS AND OTHERS AREN'T?

Consider running both activities (the washing station and hanging station) at the same time so that children can participate in the activity that best meets their current development.

This approach also gives children a non-stigmatizing way to try the more challenging activity (using the clothespins), without having to continue with a task they cannot yet perform.

MAKING MATH CONNECTIONS

Sorting helps children notice similarities and differences, a foundation for mathematical thinking and problem solving. Create a sorting opportunity by collecting a combination of clothing items (such as baby clothes, socks, a hat) and non-clothing items (such as a piece of paper, a feather, a newspaper). Place these in the basket and hang a second clothesline. Tell the children they will get to be Ms. McNosh and hang the laundry, model hanging clothing items on one line and “silly” items on the other.

Show children their prepared place at the table with a muffin tin, cotton balls, a spoon, and a pair of tongs (for children aged 30 to 48 months).

Demonstrate how to use the spoon: *I can use the spoon to make my pretend cakes, like this.* (Use the spoon to scoop cotton balls into the muffin tin.) *Let's all try it!*

If you are using tongs, explain how to use them: *I can also use tongs to make my cake. These are called tongs. Let's all say it: Tongs. You can use tongs to pick things up. Here's how you do it: I hold the tongs over whatever I want to pick up (hold them over a cotton ball) and then I squeeze them. You can close the tongs and grab the cotton ball—see! And I can carry it wherever I want to put it. When I let go, the tongs will open up and the cotton ball will drop down: See! Now you try it!*

Explain:

- Now, you can fill your muffin tins with the cotton ball cake batter.
- You can use the spoons or the tongs.

Give children time to fill their muffin tins. Note that some children may immediately switch to using their fingers—which is probably easiest for them. While doing it this way also helps them develop finger skills, encourage them to try using the spoon first. Show them how their other hand can be a “helping hand” (holding the cotton balls on the spoon) if needed. If children continue using their fingers, that's okay: it means that's where their development is right now.

Ask children questions as they work: *What flavor is your cake? Do you like cake—chocolate or vanilla? Do you ever help your grown-ups with cooking in the kitchen? What do you like to make? What is your favorite food?* Asking children questions and encouraging conversations helps toddlers and preschoolers use new vocabulary and produce longer and longer sentences.

When the muffin tins are full: Encourage children to put them in the stove in the housekeeping area. Set a timer for 30 seconds. When the timer goes off, the cakes are ready! Encourage children to “serve” the cakes by using a spoon to scoop some cotton balls onto plates from the housekeeping area. Have a cake party together!

REFLECT

Return to a gathering area with the children.

Say: *Today we tried two fun activities where we used our hands and fingers to do some work! First, we did our wash like Mrs. McNosh. Then we used two tools—spoons and tongs—to make pretend cotton ball cakes. Sometimes it's tricky to use a spoon and tongs, but we kept trying and our cakes turned out terrific!*

Ask: *Would anyone like to share their favorite thing about today's games?* Go around the circle, inviting each child to share a word or sentence. If a child responds nonverbally (point, gesture, or gaze), state what you think they may be trying to say: *Nathan is looking at the cake station. He wants us to know he baked a cotton ball cake today!*

SUMMARIZE: *Today, we learned that our hands and fingers are strong and they help us do all kinds of fun activities!*

MAKING MATH CONNECTIONS (36 TO 48 MONTHS)

Give each child a single dice. They can roll the dice and see what number comes up on top. They can count the dots and put that quantity of cotton balls in one of the muffin tin cups. They can continue rolling the dice to fill the other openings.

An alternative is for children to roll the dice, count the dots, and put one cotton ball in each of the cups until they have counted their total quantity.

This is a fun game for children and is a natural way to use math during play. You can observe to monitor their counting skills. If needed, step in to support and/or provide counting strategies (like pointing to each cotton ball or putting the balls in a line to make them visually easier to count).

Individualizing the Activity

Make it more challenging:

- In Activity 1, you can ask families to send in an old piece of clothing or an old dish towel, or another item they are no longer using. Children can practice hanging “real” clothing in this activity, which requires more strength and coordination.
- In Activity 2, you can add additional tools for children to try: an ice cream scoop, smaller tongs/tweezers, or children’s chopsticks (the ones that are joined at the top). You can also offer different materials to scoop. For example, dried beans or beads are fun to scoop with a spoon. Dried fall leaves or craft feathers are a fun challenge to pick up with tongs. Be creative and offer a variety of “scooping” stations with different materials and tools.
- In Activity 2, use the suggested early math extension. This modification requires one die per child and builds children’s counting and cardinality (quantity) skills. It also gives them a chance to practice self-regulation (stopping at the number they rolled on the dice, rather than filling the muffin tin).

Make it less challenging:

- In Activity 1, offer the washcloths first (easiest to hold and manipulate). Then move to the brush.
- In Activity 2, begin by having children transfer cotton balls using their hands/fingers. Once they can easily do that, introduce the spoon. If desired, offer an Asian-style soup spoon ([like these](#)), for this activity to start, rather than a metal table spoon, as they have a deeper well.

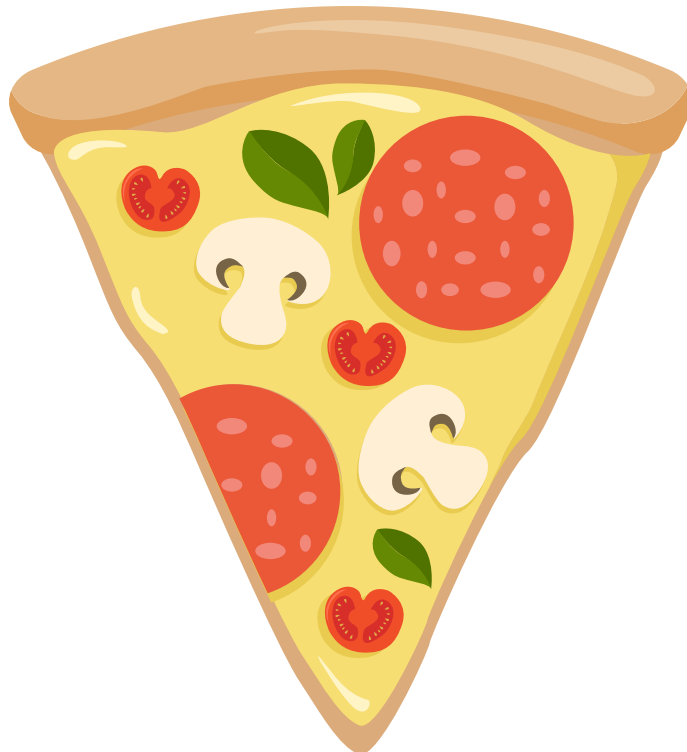
MAKING CONNECTIONS ACROSS THE DAY:

- Give children opportunities to assist with classroom tasks across the day that utilize fine motor and hand skills. For example, children can set the lunch table, serve themselves food (if your meals are served family style), stock the diaper bin, and more. Even picking up toys and putting them away is a fine motor exercise! Children enjoy contributing to their community, and many everyday tasks are also perfect opportunities to build hand/finger skills.
- Play “window washing”—fill squeeze bottles with water and give children a towel or squeegee. Let them squeeze the water onto a table or window at child height and then wash it down.
- Encourage children to engage in self-care tasks where they need to use their hands. Some examples are: hand-washing, applying lotion and sunscreen, zipping jackets, wiping their nose, wiping in the bathroom, and more. Children will *not* do these tasks perfectly and will likely still need your help to ensure they’re done appropriately. However, they need the opportunity to practice in order to master these everyday self-care behaviors.
- Create a Writing Area in the classroom that children can choose during free play. This area should have writing materials appropriate to children’s age and stage of development—for example: thin (typical) crayons, child-safe markers, short pencils, ballpoint pens, watercolors and brushes, etc. Different types of paper (writing paper, construction paper) should also be available. Envelopes and stickers are a fun addition. Alphabet stamps and stamp pads also encourage alphabetic knowledge and fine motor skills.
- Use finger-plays (like *Itsy Bitsy Spider*) as part of your daily routine with children. These games prompt children to use their hands as you say the rhyme and are a fun and natural way to build finger skills and coordination.
- Offer children the clothespins and a winter scarf as a free play activity: children can try to clip the clothespins all along the scarf. You can also set up the washing tools and water table or tongs and cotton balls as a free play choice.

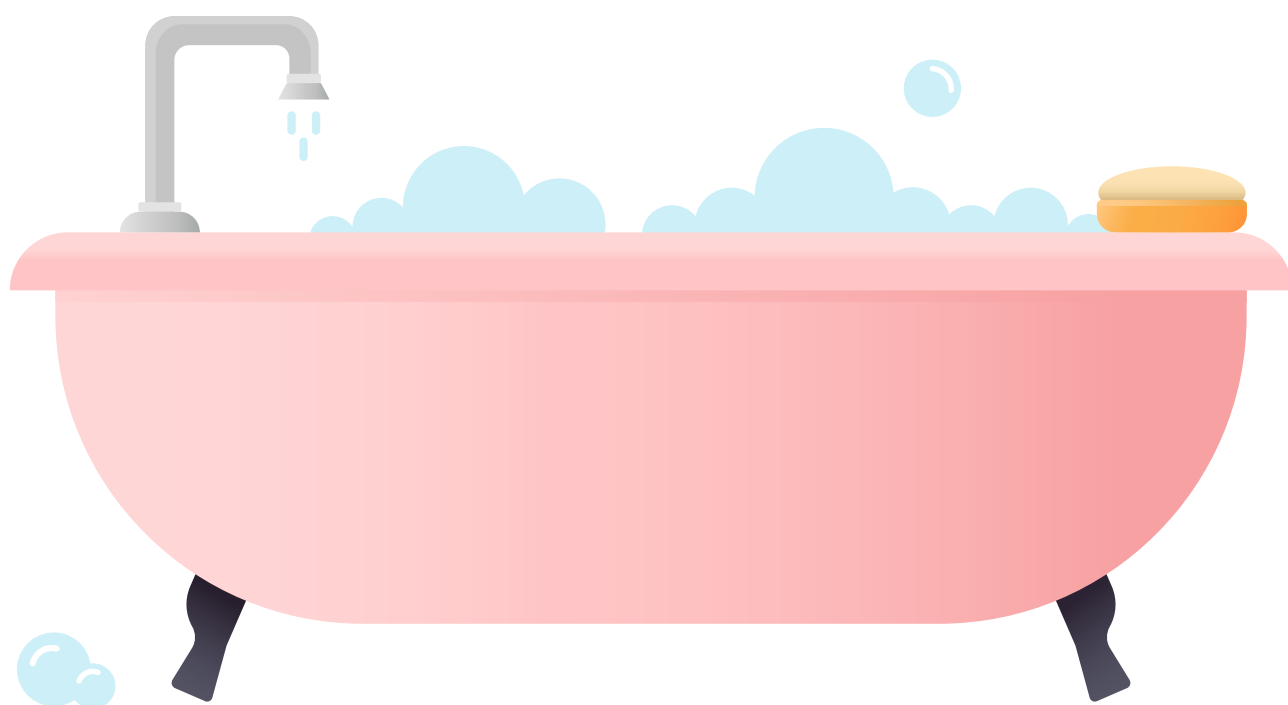
Song: *Bring Your Clothes*

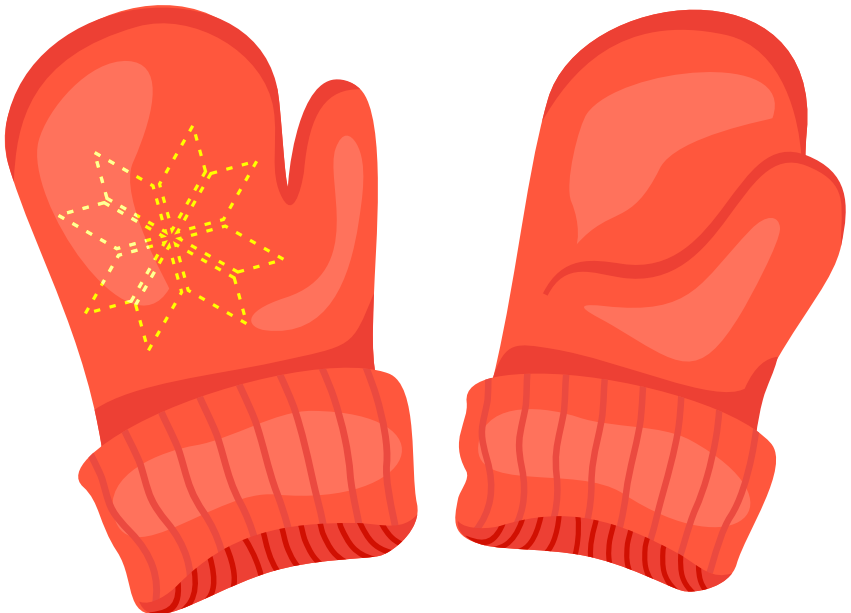
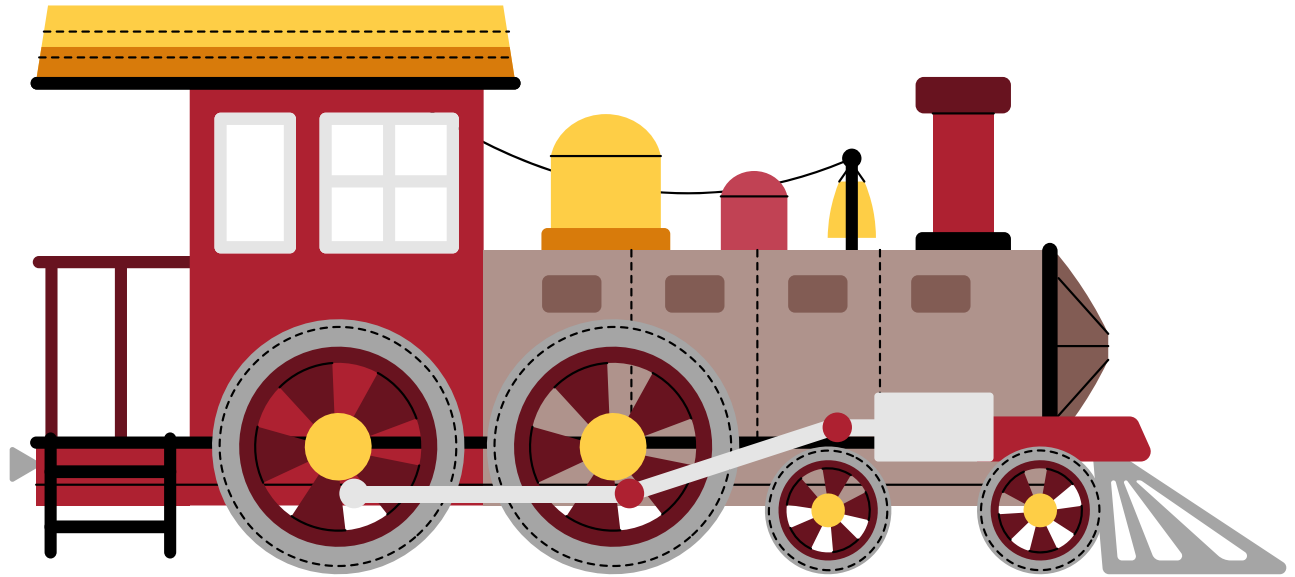
- Share this song with children: <https://bit.ly/4dkfStG>
- Prompt children to do the actions pictured in the video: Brushing teeth, washing clothes, rinsing clothes, spinning clothes, etc.

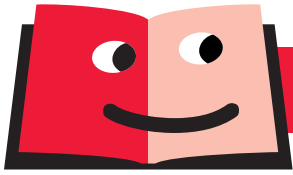
Handout 1: Clothesline Items











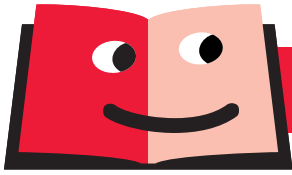
We are Building Strong Fingers and Hands!

This week, children played games that helped them build the muscles in their hands and fingers. These muscles are necessary for learning to write later on, when they are bigger.

Here are three easy ways to help your child practice their hand and finger skills at home:

- Ask your child to be your helper! We use our hands and fingers to do all kinds of household tasks. When you are doing laundry, ask your child to help you match socks, try to fold a shirt, or put t-shirts in the drawer.
- Let your child try to do self-care tasks on their own. In the bath, let them wash themselves first and then you can finish up if needed. Afterward, let them squeeze some body lotion into their hands and wipe it onto their arms or legs. Give them a chance to try dressing themselves, put on their shoes, or zip their jacket independently—providing help if they need it.
- Play sorting games. Mix up some spoons and forks into a pile on the table or floor. Play a game where your child has to separate them into a pile of spoons and a pile of forks. This game not only gives children a chance to use their hand/finger coordination, it also builds math skills like sorting!





Solo para familias

¡Estamos fortaleciendo los dedos y las manos!

Esta semana, los niños hicieron juegos que les ayudaron a fortalecer los músculos de las manos y los dedos. Estos músculos son necesarios para aprender a escribir más adelante, cuando sean más grandes.

A continuación, le ofrecemos tres formas sencillas de ayudar a su hijo a practicar en casa sus habilidades de manos y dedos:

- ¡Pídale a su hijo que le ayude! Usamos nuestras manos y dedos para hacer todo tipo de tareas domésticas. El día de lavado de la ropa, pídale a su hijo que le ayude a emparejar los calcetines o a guardar las camisetas en la gaveta.
- Deje que su hijo trate de hacer las tareas de cuidado personal por sí solo. En el baño, deje que se lave primero y luego usted puede terminar de hacerlo, si es necesario. Después, deje que se eche un poco de loción para el cuerpo en las manos y se la extienda por los brazos o las piernas. Deje que trate de vestirse, ponerse los zapatos o cerrarse la chaqueta de forma independiente, ayudándole si lo necesita.
- Hagan juegos de clasificación. Coloque cucharas y tenedores amontonados en la mesa o en el piso. Juegue a un juego en el que su hijo tenga que separarlos en una pila de cucharas y otra de tenedores. Este juego no solo les da a los niños la oportunidad de usar la coordinación de manos y dedos, sino que también refuerza ciertas habilidades matemáticas como la clasificación.

