

HAND DOMINANCE

What is it?

Hand dominance (or handedness) is the preference of one hand over another. Once a child establishes a hand dominance, they will often be labelled as either right-handed or left-handed. In some occasions, the individual might be labelled as ambidextrous or mixed-handed.

Types of hand dominance

1. Right-handed or left-handed –

Using either right or left hand, respectively, to complete daily tasks such as picking up objects or drawing/writing.

2. Ambidextrous –

Individuals who are equally skilled in using both hands at the same level. Only about 1% of the population is ambidextrous.

3. Mixed-handed or cross-dominance –

Individuals who change their hand preference depending on the task.



Why is it important?

Developing a hand dominance is important as it allows the individual to develop more skilled movements using that hand. For example, this is needed when writing or using cutlery.

How do I know if my child needs help?

Children who have not yet established hand dominance often display the following behaviours:

- Pick up objects with different hands depending on where the object is located in relation to their body (e.g. on the left or right side of them)
- Swap hands in the middle of an activity
- Sometimes choose to use their right hand and sometimes choose to use their left hand for the same activity

Frequently Asked Questions

If you're not sure which hand your child prefers, observe them in their daily activities such as, when they pick up toys, cutlery, throwing a ball, or when you give them a high five. Depending on the age of your child, they may automatically use one hand more than the other.



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Kids**

✉ info@readykids.com.au ☎ (07) 3301 1823 🌐 readykids.com.au

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Frequently Asked Questions

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How do I support my child in choosing their dominant hand?

When presenting something to your child, try and position yourself in front of them and present the item to them in the centre of their body. Some children might pick up the item with their closest hand e.g. if you give it to them on the right side of their body, they will choose their right hand to pick up the object, but if you present it to them on the left side of the body, they will choose the left hand to pick the object. Presenting the object in the centre allows your child to naturally pick up the object with their preferred hand. This is an important strategy especially if your child has not yet established a hand dominance.

Also, if your child has not yet established their hand dominance, you can refer their hands as "doing hand" (for the dominant hand) and "helper hand" (for the supporting hand). This means for children who are not familiar with terminology like 'left' and 'right', they are able to understand concepts of dominant and non-dominant hands.

What if my child is using their left hand?

Although only 10% of the world is left-handed, it is okay if your child has a preference to use their left hand. It is important not to force your child to swap hands to change their hand preference. There are currently increasing amount of tools used for individuals who are left handed e.g. left-handed scissors. In saying this, it is important to differentiate whether your child is left-handed, swapping between both hands, or has difficulty crossing the midline.

What if my child keeps changing hands?

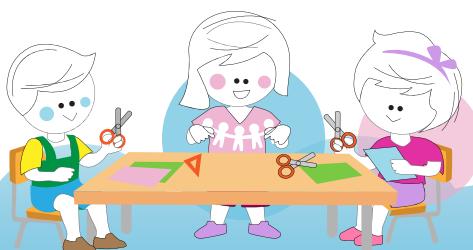
If your child is constantly changing between using their right or left hand, they might not yet have an established hand dominance or they have not yet developed the muscle endurance in their dominant hand and when they become tired, they will swap hands.

If they have not yet established a hand dominance, continue to provide them with opportunities to use their hand and present items in their centre. Continue to observe which hand they spontaneously use.



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If they often start with the same hand and then only change to the other hand in the middle of the activity, they might have reduced hand muscle endurance and strength. Once your child has started using one hand for the task, encourage them to continue using that hand until the end of the activity. This allows them to develop muscle endurance in that hand.

At what age should my child have established hand dominance?

For the majority of the population, it is typical for children to start developing a hand preference from 2 years old onwards with a clear established hand dominance when they are 6 years old.

Activities to do with my Child

- Colouring, drawing and writing activities
- Cutting with scissors
- Building with blocks and Lego
- Playing board and card games
- Painting and drawing on an easel
- Playing musical instruments
- Brushing teeth and hair
- Using cutlery, such as spoon and fork
- Ball skills – throwing and catching ball, kicking
- Give them high 5s and hand shakes throughout the day



References

- Department of Occupational Therapy, Royal Children's Hospital, 2005. Hand Preference. Melbourne: Royal Children's Hospital. Available at: https://www.rch.org.au/uploadedFiles/Main/Content/ot/InfoSheet_B.pdf [Accessed 23 August 2020]
- Verywell Family. 2020. Your Child's Hand Dominance Isn't Something They Choose. [online] Available at: <https://www.verywellfamily.com/hand-dominance-what-is-a-dominant-hand-620856#:~:text=Hand%20dominance%20is%20the%20preference,that%20we%20make%20as%20children.> [Accessed 23 August 2020].



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