

Is Your Child Left-Handed?

Though the right hand is right for most people, it's wrong for about 10% of people destined to be lefties, according to Pediatric Rehabilitation (2006). Trust nature and time to reveal your child's handedness.

When will you know if your child is left-handed? In *Helping Your Left-Handed Preschool Child*, Laura Milsom indicates that some children show they are left-handed from day one, even sucking their left thumb. However, it is not uncommon to show no distinct preference even at 3 or 4 years of age. Because a child's hand preference may be slow to develop, encourage your child to experiment using both hands for eating, holding, and placing objects.

Milsom suggests paying attention to the hand your child uses:

- ☞ to reach for toys and crayons.
- ☞ for eating.
- ☞ for stirring; left-handers usually stir counter-clockwise.
- ☞ to turn things; left-handers will try to turn things anti-clockwise, against the thread of the screw or wind up a toy by unwinding it.
- ☞ to brush teeth or comb hair.

When standing on one leg, does your child feel more secure on the left? When you help a left-handed child to dress, notice that the child often prefers to put the right leg in first while standing on the left leg.

Catching and throwing a ball is a mixture of dominant hand and dominant eye, so is not always an accurate measure of hand preference.

The handwriting research article by Clinton Hackney, *The Left-Handed Child in a Right-Handed World*, offers some simple tests for determining hand dominance:

Hand puppet—Place a hand puppet on the table. In a play situation, observe onto which hand the child puts the puppet.

Key and lock—Place a key on the table. Ask the child to take the key and unlock a lock. Observe the child, noticing which hand is used to open the lock.

Hammering nails—Using a lightweight hammer and tacks, let your child hammer several tacks into place. Watch for hand preference.

If the child indicates true ambidexterity, Hackney suggests it is probably better to train the right hand.



What if your child prefers the left hand?

If your child shows any preference for their left hand, be sure your child has the tools and equipment for making tasks a rewarding and positive experience. Milsom indicates that many a child struggles needlessly with the wrong equipment, layout, and positioning simply because someone did not notice the child is left-handed. These difficulties can easily be avoided if your child is taught the best left-handed techniques and has left-handed tools (baseball gloves and scissors) available. Milsom offers suggestions for supporting a left-handed child:

- ☞ If you are right-handed, stand opposite your left-handed child to show them how to tie shoelaces as your right-handed actions are reversed, like a mirror image.
- ☞ In the kitchen, as you guide your left-hander at mixing and pouring, position the handles on pitchers and cups toward your child's left hand.
- ☞ There is no such thing as a universal scissors. Make sure your left-handed child has a proper pair of left-handed scissors. When left-handed children struggle with right-handed scissors, they are unlikely to blame the scissors, but assume they are "no good at cutting out."
- ☞ Left and right-handers may share the same computer and mouse. A really useful piece of free software called SwapMouseButton can be downloaded to your desktop. It allows you to reverse mouse buttons using the F12 key as a toggle switch. It is available at <http://members.jcom.home.ne.jp/mtpsoft/swapmousebuttons/>

For more information and left-handed products, go to www.lefthandedchildren.org

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"Strengthen the hand that is used for writing. Spend several minutes daily squeezing a small ball of play dough. When a child has a better grip and control over the pencil or crayon, teachers are less likely to be apprehensive. They realize there is nothing "wrong" with the child. This exercise is also helpful to right-handed kids, but teachers are not usually as anxious if a right-handed child lacks grip strength," says CarolynKorner child care provider.

Advocate for your left-handed child, suggests the Left-Handers in Society webpage. Be sure your child has "lefty" equipment. Look for coaches and music instructors who know how to instruct left-handers. Be supportive, as one mother reports:

***August 13th is Left-Handed Day.
The whole family uses their left hands that day to celebrate her son and how special he is.***

A caution: *Total Health* reports that if your child has a left-handed preference, be mindful that left-handedness appears to be a risk factor for unintentional injury. We live in a right-handed society. Hand tools, machines, even doors are designed on the basis of this attitude.

Sources:

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