

## Hand-Under-Hand and Hand-Over-Hand Instruction for Blind Babies<sup>1</sup>

If your child has a visual impairment, she can use the senses of touch, hearing, and smell to obtain information that typically sighted children gather visually. To help her learn about the world and the things in it, try to involve all her senses when you are engaged with her and explaining something new.

If you are introducing your child to an unfamiliar safe item, describe the item to your child and encourage her to explore it using all of her senses. It is through these experiences your child becomes an active, engaged learner.

Only after your child has independently explored (if time permits, to her heart's content), you can invite your child to let your hands demonstrate proper use of the item. **Utilizing your hands to guide your child's hands is called hand-under-hand and hand-over-hand instruction.**

Some examples of activities in which your child will benefit from using hand-under-hand or hand-over-hand to learn include using a measuring spoon to scoop out baking soda when [making cookies](#), pushing a button through a button hole when dressing, or positioning a pair of scissors to cut a line.

When using hand-under-hand or hand-over-hand, work from behind your child so that your hands and hers will be moving in the same direction. If she is young, you can sit her on your lap. When she is older, sit behind her or next to her and reach your arms around her.

Before you show your child how to do something using either method, try it yourself with your eyes closed. Pay attention to the steps you are taking to do the activity. Try to pick out things to point out to your child, such as the fact that buttonholes are near the edge of a blouse or shirt.

Most children need multiple demonstrations of a new task to learn it. Because your child may not be able to see another person doing a task clearly or at all, the only demonstration she may receive is the one she feels through the use of hand-under-hand or hand-over-hand. Be patient and give her many opportunities to practice a new skill when you are using either technique.

Some children are resistant to trying new activities. They'll pull their hands away and won't want to touch. Try to respect the message your child is giving you if she does this. However, if she is never encouraged to try new things, she won't expand her understanding and interest in the world around her. Another option is to talk with your child's [early intervention team](#), if she has one, about what strategies may work best for your child to get her to try new activities. You

---

<sup>1</sup> FamilyConnect. <http://www.familyconnect.org/info/browse-by-age/infants-and-toddlers/education-iandt/hand-under-hand-and-hand-over-hand/1235>



might want to lovingly, yet firmly, encourage her to try new activities using either hand-under-hand or hand-over-hand guidance.

## Hand-Under-Hand Technique

When you use the hand-under-hand technique, your hands perform the activity while your child's hands rest on top of yours—in this way, your child can feel what your hands are doing. If the activity is new to your child, and she is hesitant to try it, she may feel more secure touching your hands rather than the unknown object or activity. Also, because her palms are on your hands, she'll be able to focus her energy on feeling the movements of your hands. She may also feel more comfortable and in control because she can freely remove her hands if she wants to. As you perform the activity, verbally describe what you are doing with your hands.

## Hand-Over-Hand Technique

When you use the hand-over-hand technique to help your child do an activity, you place your hands over your child's hands. Your child is the one who is touching the materials, and your hands guide her as she manipulates the materials to complete the activity. As you find she is able to do small parts of the activity, you can lessen the support your hands are providing by either pulling your hands away or moving them to her wrist or arm. This way, your hands are ready to come back and lend support if she needs assistance.

## Final Thoughts

Whether you choose to use hand-under-hand or hand-over-hand instruction, remember the important first step of allowing your child to explore and learn independently. Without this active engagement, your child can become a passive learner who is less likely to comprehend the lesson and is less enthused about the learning process.

