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## Using Your Left Hand

The job of a left-hand finger is to shorten the vibrating string length by pressing the string into a fret. The shorter the vibrating string, the higher the *pitch* (pitch is the highness or lowness of the sound). Note that we *do not press the string into the wood of the fretboard*. It is by pressing the string securely into the fret wire that we change the vibrating length of the string, so the most efficient left-hand technique is one that accomplishes this using as little strength as necessary. Be sure to review How to Read Chord Diagrams with your child.

### Introducing the Left-Hand Fingers

Numbers are given to the left-hand fingers for easy identification. The fingers are numbered consecutively, with the index finger being 1 and the pinky, 4.

1. Have your child hold up their left hand. Point to each finger and say the corresponding finger number.
2. Repeat, but this time, ask your child to say the finger number as you point.

### Practice Suggestions

1. Have your child trace their left hand on a separate piece of paper. Then, number each finger.
2. Have your child hold up their left hand. As you call out finger numbers, have them wiggle the correct finger.

### Hand Position and Placing a Finger on a String

Fingers are naturally stronger and will provide the best leverage in a curled position, like gently holding a ball. The left thumb should be in the middle of the back of the guitar neck, between fingers 1 and 2. Keeping the elbow loosely in and the fingers curled, use the very tips of the fingers to press the strings, placing them directly next to the fret wire, but not actually ON the fret.

### Practice Suggestion—Butterfly Finger Exercise

1. Using the photos on page 17 as a guide, have your child lightly place finger 1 , without pressing down, on the 2nd string, right next to the 1st fret. You can say the finger should be “like a butterfly landing on the string.”
2. Ask him or her to pluck the 2nd string with the pick or right-hand finger. You will hear a clicking, unpitched sound. No note will be heard.
3. Have your child slowly begin to add pressure with the finger as they pluck the string. The instant the string sings out a clear note, the student should stop adding pressure. That is as hard as he or she needs to press to play.

### Subsequent Lessons

Your child may experience a little discomfort at first. It takes a while to develop calluses at the tips of the left-hand fingers. Keep practice sessions short to minimize associating discomfort with playing guitar, and always remind him or her that their fingers should not press hard or squeeze the neck. Repeat the “butterfly finger” exercise described above often.

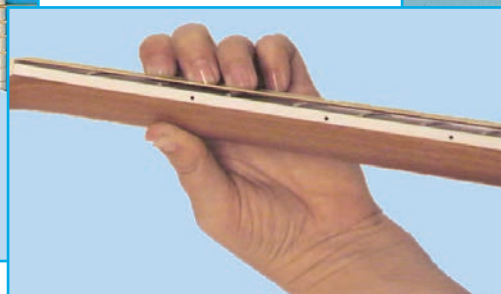
# Using Your Left Hand

## Hand Position

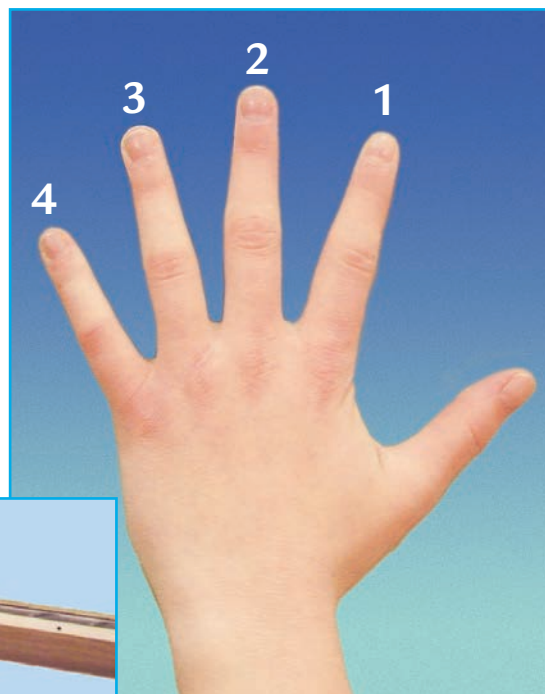
Learning to use your left-hand fingers easily starts with a good hand position. Place your hand so your thumb rests comfortably in the middle of the back of the neck. Position your fingers on the front of the neck as if you are gently squeezing a ball between them and your thumb. Keep your elbow in and your fingers curved.



Keep elbow in and fingers curved



Like gently squeezing a ball between your fingertips and thumb



## Placing a Finger on a String

When you press a string with a left-hand finger, make sure you press firmly with the tip of your finger and as close to the fret wire as you can without actually being right on it. Short fingernails are important! This will create a clean, bright tone.



**RIGHT**  
Finger presses the string down near the fret without actually being on it.



**WRONG**  
Finger is too far from fret wire; tone is "buzzy" and indefinite.



**WRONG**  
Finger is on top of fret wire; tone is muffled and unclear.

## How to Read Chord Diagrams

Chord diagrams show where to place your fingers. The example to the right shows finger 1 on the first string at the first fret. The Xs above the sixth, fifth and fourth strings tell you not to play them and only strum the third, second and first strings. Strings that are not played in a chord also look like dashed lines. The Os above the second and third strings tell you these strings are to be played *open*, meaning without pressing down on them with a left-hand finger.

