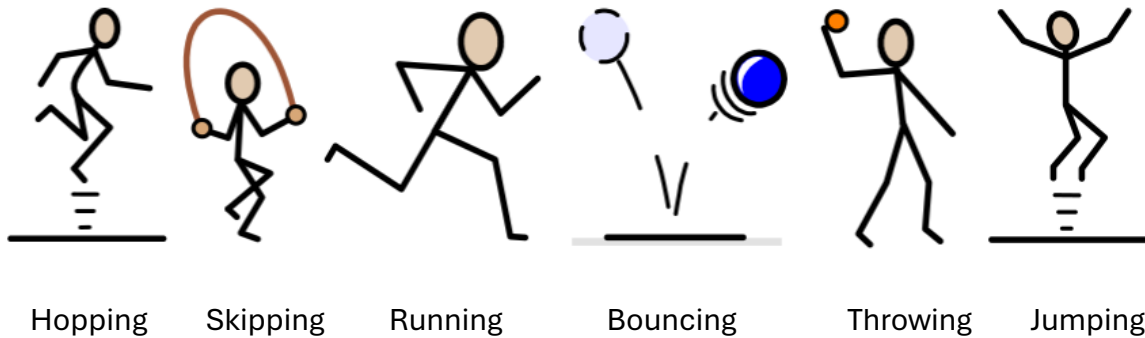


Introduction to gross motor skills



These are large movements such as running, jumping, moving from sitting to standing, climbing, crawling etc. All of the following are important for gross motor skills:

- Motor planning – organising and sequencing movements
- Body awareness – knowing where the different parts of your body are in space at any one time
- Position in Space – knowing where your body is in relation to the objects or people around you
- Balance
- Upper body strength
- Upper body stability
- Integrating both sides of the body so that they work in harmony

Motor planning – organising and sequencing movements

Good motor planning enables the child to think of an idea, organise and plan a task and carry it out in a coordinated and sequenced way.

Activity suggestions

- ‘Simon Says’ – Copy body actions and postures. Add interest by making two requests such as left hand on head and right on tummy.
- Instruct the child to perform a sequence movements e.g. Walk, clap, jump.
- Use playground equipment – slides and swings.
- Use hoops to jump into, pull over head, twist around arms, legs and waist.
- Bean bag targets and hop scotch.
- Pretend to walk or move like animals, for example a rabbit, kangaroo, crab, frog, cat etc.
- Dribble a football or golf-ball around cones or between skittles.
- Movement instructions: with their eyes closed, the child has to follow instructions that they are given – for example turn to the right, one jump forwards, two steps to the left etc. Begin with the eyes open, if closed is too difficult.
- ‘Twister’ game.

Body awareness

Body awareness is an appreciation of our body position in space.

Activity suggestions

These will help the child be more aware of their body position and/or become more calm and organised:

- Do “heavy work” activities such as carrying equipment, a pile of books, shopping, a laundry basket, or a rucksack.
- Give the child opportunities to sit or lie on a fitness ball or bounce on a trampoline.
- Add some light wrist weights to the child’s arms when learning a new skill to give extra feedback about the position of their arm/hands e.g. when throwing a ball.
- Outline the child’s body on a large sheet of paper and get them to paint and label the body parts.
- Ask the child to copy the adult touching their own body parts as demonstrated by the adult. Start with large parts first, for example head, shoulders, arms, legs etc. then move onto smaller parts, i.e. eyes, ears, hands etc. Can be completed with eyes open or closed.
- Ask the child to lie back and relax with their eyes closed. When the adult names a body part, the child touches the named part, i.e. right little finger, toes, head.
- Encourage the child’s family to get involved in activities such as walking, swimming, outdoor sports games. Doing an activity as a family can often be more fun for the child.

Position in space

This involves knowing where your body is in relation to the objects or people around you.

Activity Suggestions

- **Collage:** cut out pictures or shapes with scissors. Arrange and paste them on the paper, in specific positions, to form a collage.
- **Playground:** climb or play on the equipment as appropriate, with supervision.
- **Puzzles:** child cuts out a picture from a magazine, glues it on cardboard and cuts it into pieces. Increase the pieces as the child’s ability improves.
- **Copying Objects:** make a 3-dimensional shape (e.g. with cubes or bricks), which the child has to try to replicate exactly.

Balance

This involves 2 different skills:

- Being able to stand still on one leg (static balance)
- Being able to balance when hopping, jumping and walking on a line (dynamic balance).

Activity suggestions

- **Rope game:** stretch a long rope on the floor which is taped down at the ends. Ask the child to walk along it without falling off. You can give them other challenges too: jumping over the rope with both feet all the way along the rope; walking backwards along the rope; walking with a foot on either side of the rope.
- **Rocking board/wobble board balance:** encourage the child to get on their hands and knees on a wobbly board. If the child can maintain their balance, encourage them to progress to standing.

- **‘Twister’**: as rules of the game. Adapt by getting the children to maintain their balance for as long as possible.

Upper body strength

Upper body strength and stability is needed to enable a child to carry out many gross motor movements and to maintain an upright posture to complete activities such as handwriting, cutting and eating meals.

Activity suggestions

- **Encourage kneeling on all fours** to do a puzzle, pass a ball etc.
- **Create an obstacle course** where the child has to crawl through boxes, hoops and moving up, over and under obstacles.
- **Art activities on an easel or with paper pinned on the wall.** Encourage the child to make large vertical, horizontal lines and circular patterns on the paper. Any activities which involve working on a vertical plain are useful e.g. games on a chalkboard, helping with hanging out washing, cleaning windows, painting outdoor walls with a paintbrush dipped in water.
- **Encourage the child to stand at a table** (positioned at the approximate height of the child’s hips) then participate in a table-top activity e.g. roll out dough/pastry with a rolling pin, press cutter shapes into the dough; hand prints with paint; wipe table clean (making large circular movements to cover the area).

Shoulder stability

In order to have a stable shoulder joint, all the muscles around the shoulder joint must be working well together.

Activity suggestions

- **Playground games:** the child plays on equipment, supporting themselves by holding onto the ropes/handle and thus encouraging their shoulder stability.
- **Gym games:** the child climbs or crawls across the rungs of the equipment, stabilising their shoulder by firmly extending their elbows.
- **Wheelbarrows:** the child positions themselves on all fours on the floor; the adult holds the child’s knees/lower legs/feet and lifts them off the floor. The child moves him/herself around by ‘walking’ on their hands.

Both sides of the body working together

This skill (sometimes called ‘bilateral Integration’) is the ability to use two sides of the body together to complete a task effectively (e.g. cutting or riding a bicycle).

Activity suggestions

- Construction toys such as Lego, stickle bricks.
- Ball games – using a large ball and two hands, roll, catch and throw. Progress to a small ball or beanbag, alternatively use a bat to keep a balloon or ball from falling to the floor.
- Arm windmills – to make this more fun, use cardboard batons with ribbons attached, make windmill movements, snakes, circles (clockwise and anticlockwise), lazy 8’s.
- Simon says – give instructions that involve crossing the body, for example left hand on to right ear. Increase from one step instructions to 2-3 step commands.

- Lazy 8's – perform this movement in the air with each hand individually or with hands clasped together.
- Throw beanbags into a hoop/box – place beanbags on the floor at one side of the body, use the hand from the other side of body to pick them up and throw them into a hoop/box.