

Gross Motor Skills

Practical advice and activity ideas to encourage the development of Gross Motor skills.



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Introduction

This booklet has been designed to provide practical ideas and activities to help support your child/ young person to develop their gross motor skills. All references to child / children mean either a child or young person.

Gross motor skills are large movements your child makes with their arms, legs, feet, or entire body. For example; crawling, running and jumping are gross motor skills.

Gross motor skills can be challenging for many children for a number of reasons:

- Lack of experience or practice.
- Difficulty using two sides of the body together (bilateral integration).
- Reduced balance caused by poor core stability.
- Difficulty planning and organising themselves to follow instructions.
- Poor spatial (space) awareness skills.

In many cases, supporting a child on a regular basis to practice gross motor activities should encourage their skills to improve.

Games and activities can be introduced to your child at any time throughout the day. Try to create lots of opportunities as this can be very helpful for your child's gross motor development.

The booklet also contains other useful resources; local authority websites, active school co-ordinators, clubs.

Remember...

- Regular practice (five to ten minutes each day) will help your child improve their skills.
- Encourage your child by providing praise and encouragement for their efforts and success.
- Start easy and gradually make tasks more difficult for example, if your child is having difficulty with knowing where parts of his/her body are knowing left and right, start by doing activities which focus on body parts. Once this is known, start introducing left and right.
- Make it fun!



Planning and organisation

Sometimes it can be difficult to do the things we want to do. Sometimes it can be very hard to think of an idea, organise and then sequence and carry out unfamiliar and complex body movements in a co-ordinated manner. Here are a few pointers.

Motor planning tips when learning new things

- Consistency – Practice new tasks in the same place with the same materials each time.
- Repetition – Repeat the same task for several days or even weeks, with each repetition, remain consistent.
- Demonstration – In group situations, allow the child to watch his/her peers complete a task first. This will provide the child with a visual demonstration and more time to learn how to do the activity.
- Support verbal instructions with visual demonstration.
- Even if you are only extending a task or changing it slightly, assume that the child is learning a whole new task from the beginning.

- Encourage the child to talk his way through an activity for the first few times, create rhymes, this will help the child develop their planning and doing skills.
- Clear short instructions – Use only one command at a time.
- Go at the child’s pace – If a child is not ready or willing to learn a skill, it will be much harder to teach. Teach one step at a time making sure the child has some success no matter how small.
- Praise all efforts – Often a child will put huge amounts of effort and still not complete a task successfully. It is important to praise efforts rather than results.
- Try to balance assistance and independence – Encourage the child to do as much as they can for themselves. Provide opportunities for activities that are matched to the child’s needs and abilities. Consider activities that are not competitive, self-paced, and group-optional, as these can help boost self-confidence. Some children do better learning new skills individually or in small groups before joining a larger group. Choose the best environment to help the child learn.



Goal, Plan, Do and Check

Goal	Plan	Do	Check
<p data-bbox="120 304 303 432">What am I going to do?</p> <p data-bbox="120 464 325 560">What is my goal?</p>	<p data-bbox="344 304 516 432">How am I going to do it?</p> <p data-bbox="344 464 527 743">Ask questions for example, “What do you think you should do first?” “What do you need to do that?”</p> <p data-bbox="344 775 544 1091">Use visual cues for example, pictures and timetables to help a child plan a routine of activities or the steps of an action.</p>	<p data-bbox="568 304 740 384">Go ahead and do it.</p> <p data-bbox="568 416 768 804">While doing an activity, if your child forgets the next step, instead of giving direct instructions, encourage them to go back to their timetable.</p>	<p data-bbox="792 304 941 432">How did my plan go?</p> <p data-bbox="792 464 981 995">Encourage your child to reorganise what they did right as well as where they went wrong. This will help them to know what they did well and what they can do differently when they try again.</p>

Bilateral Integration

Bilateral integration is using both sides of the body together. It is an important foundation for the development and co-ordination between right and left sides of the body and effective two-handed co-ordination. Tasks that the child may find challenging include cutlery, tying shoelaces, completing buttons or zips.

Here are some activities that can be done during play and home activities that help to develop bilateral skills.

- **Washing the dishes:** Start off with practising on the pots, Make sure the pots are on one side of the sink and that when you wash them you use one hand to scrub the pot and one to hold it. Finish by lifting with both hands and putting on the drainer so you can dry them later.



- **Dusting and wiping:** This is best done on a large surface like a table or wardrobe or doors. Using a cloth in both hands wipe the surface trying to reach as far as you can and stretch as far as you can with both hands particularly moving from side to side. Keep your feet in the same place on the floor and just use your arms. Go upward, downward and side to side.

- **Rolling out play dough:** Sit or stand to do this activity. Use both hands to roll the dough flat. You could put the cutters into the dough and use the rolling pin to push the cutter into the play dough. Remember to use your full reach.
- **Pillow fights:** Remember to hold the pillow with two hands, this activity naturally encourages movement of the arms across the body to reach your opponent.
- **Raking in the leaves garden:** Rake the leaves up around you using both hands. Try and stand in the one place and make a big pile of leaves.
- **Play ‘Simon Says’:** Imitating postures that emphasise crossing midline, diagonal, and alternating motor movements.



Bilateral Integration exercises

Knee Windmills:

- Touch left knee with right hand
- Stand up straight
- Touch right knee with left hand
- Stand up straight

Easy: 5 times

Hard: 10 times

Windmills:

- Touch left foot with right hand
- Stand up straight
- Touch right foot with left hand
- Stand up straight

Easy: 5 times

Hard: 10 times

Marching:

- March on the spot
- Lift knees high

Easy: 10 sec

Hard: 20 sec

Jumping Jacks:

- Jump feet out, hands above head
- Bring feet together hands at side



Easy: 5 times

Hard: 10 times

Push Ups:

- Place hands on floor, arms straight
- Push up keeping body straight
- Perform on knees if necessary

Easy: 5 times

Hard: 10 times

All Fours:

- Lift up right arm and left leg
- Slowly lower
- Repeat on opposite side

Easy: 4 times Hard: 8 times

Wall Squats:

- Place feet about 12-24 inches from wall
- Lean back against the wall
- Slowly bend knees and squat
- Hold position

Easy: 5 sec

Hard: 10 sec

Tuck and Rock (Popcorn Position):

- Bring knees to chest
- Wrap arms tightly around knees
- Rock back and forth on your back

Easy: 5 times

Hard: 10 times

Core stability

Working on postural control /core stability, and increasing shoulder and pelvic girdle strength and stability helps to develop gross motor co-ordination skills. The more stable your child is in their core (trunk), the better their hand and foot function will be.

- **Animal walks:** Such as a frog jump, bunny hop, commando crawl, crab walk. Make up games to help their motivation to do these exercises such as crab football. When playing crab football, make sure your child's bottom is off the floor and in line with their shoulders and knees. Try and increase the time your child does animal walks for.
- **Foot balloon volleyball:** Maintain position like a crab, kick the balloon from one person to another and try not to let it touch the ground.
- **Any push/pull activities:** Commando crawling, moving furniture around a room, climbing wall bars, climbing on playground equipment or swinging from over head bars/ladders in the playground.
- **Trampoline:** Jumping with feet together and apart, hopping on either foot, and also bouncing in a high kneeling position.



- **Wheelbarrow races:** (walking on hands whilst an adult carries the child's legs). Initially your child may need support at their hips to wheelbarrow walk. As their upper limb strength develops, support can be decreased to supporting your child at their knees and then at the ankles.
- **The Bridge:** Ask your child to lie on their back with their knees bent and feet flat on the floor, arms by their side. Ask your child to lift their bottom up so that they form a bridge. Hold for 10 seconds and then ask them to slowly go back down to the starting position.
- **Donkey Kick:** Start in 4-point kneeling (on hands and knees). Ask your child to stretch one leg out behind them and hold it straight so that their foot is at the same height as their bottom. Hold this for five seconds and then return knee slowly to the floor. As this exercise becomes easier, your child could increase the time to ten seconds.

Activity ideas for older children/young people

- horse riding
- swimming
- sitting on a gym ball to read or use computer

- gym activities, for example - rowing machine, elliptical trainer/cross trainer, running machine.

Spatial/Body Awareness

Children with poor spatial/body awareness will often bump into things and/or knock items over; they can have difficulties judging the space between their body and other people or objects. They may hesitate during activities that require movement and check by looking to make sure their body is how it should be.



- **Simon Says:** Start with easy directions depending on the age and skills of your child for example, you may start with something like ‘hands on heads’ or ‘hands on ears.’ Gradually make the directions more difficult as your child’s skills develop for example ‘right hand on right shoulder,’ then ‘left hand on right shoulder’ then ‘touch your toes, elbows and eyes.’
- **Body Outlines:** Either yourself or your child lies on a large piece of paper, or on the path. Take a pencil or piece of chalk and draw around your child’s body. Name each body part as you trace around it.

- **Mirror Games:** Facing a mirror, take turns copying movements by looking in the mirror. Try things like waving, shaking a foot, putting hands on knees.
- **Human mirrors:** One person does the movements and the other person copies these pretending to be the mirror.
- **Obstacle Courses:** Make up an obstacle course either outside or inside. Start with activities that your child can easily manage. To develop his/her skills, increase the challenge and difficulty gradually.



Ideas of things to include...

- Crawling under things like a table or chair, or through tunnels or large open boxes.
- Crawling/walking over a pile of cushions or a large bean bag.
- Climbing up a step or onto a box and jumping off.
- Walking/jumping through hoops or chalk design on ground.

- Toss small bean bags or soft toys into a bucket.
- Jumping a rope.
- Balance along a chalk/ tape line on the floor
- Visit local parks and playgrounds and use climbing and other equipment.
- Musical Action Songs: For pre-schoolers activities such as the ‘hokey cokey’, The Singing Kettle, Funbox may be beneficial to try.
- Other games: ‘Twister’, dancing, playing ‘statues’, Cranium Hullabaloo



Ball Skills

Catching and throwing a ball requires the child to be able to integrate the visual information about the speed, flight and size of the ball. The child needs to know how much to move their body, arms and fingers and time their movements so that they are in the right place when the ball arrives.

The child needs to be able to adjust the amount of force to throw, to the weight and size of the ball in order for it to reach the target accurately.

There are many different ways to grade ball catching to make sure it is at the level appropriate to your child. Being able to catch a ball should make your child feel that they have achieved something so it is important to get the level of challenge ‘just right’. The three variables you can grade in ball catching are:

- Position
- Size of Ball
- Distance



The most stable position is sitting on the floor, followed by kneeling, sitting on a stool or chair, standing and then standing on an uneven or wobbly surface.

Start with a balloon as it moves through space more slowly and will give more time to prepare for catching. Then try a large soft ball and gradually reduce the size of the ball. You can also try a beanbag or ‘koosh ball’ as these are easier to catch than a small ball.

Start with a short distance between you and your child and gradually increase the distance once he/she can catch a ball at that distance.

Always encourage your child to look at you before you throw the ball.

Encourage your child to bring arms out and position them to an appropriate distance from each other depending on a ball's size.

Suggested Equipment List:

- Balloons
- Various sized balls
- Bean bags
- Target
- Different bats and racquets

Level 1: Easy

- Stable Person – Stable Target.
- Hitting Ball: The child hits the stationary ball with their hand or kicks it with foot. Gradually moving on to using rackets or bats.
- Beanbag Toss: Throw beanbags/balls into a bucket or target drawn on the floor or wall.
- Bowling: Bowl a bean bag over progressively longer distances, high into the air, at a large target for example, door, wall, skittles. Progress to rolling a ball.

Level 2: Intermediate

- Stable Person – Moving Target
- Balloon Catch: Catch a balloon or play balloon ‘keepy ups ‘ (hitting balloon to keep off the ground, this can be done with hands or other body parts like head, elbows or feet). Balloons travel slower than balls so this will give more time for the child to react to the moving target.
- Catching Balls (all shapes and sizes): Catch a ball while sitting or standing. Increase the distance gradually. Use balls of various sizes for example, beach ball, football, rugby ball or tennis ball.
- Baseball Practice: Hit a ball using bats/racquets while standing in a stationary position.

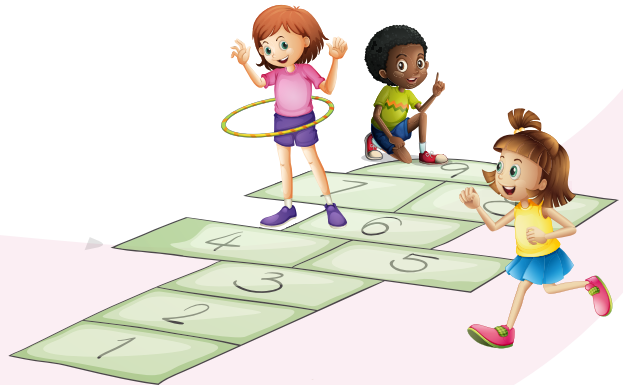
Level 3: Advanced

- Moving Person – Moving target.
- Dribbles: Bounce ball on the floor while walking or running.
- Ball Sports: Most ball sports –basketball, netball, volleyball, football or tennis.
- Wobble Board: Catch an object thrown when standing on a wobble board.
- Pass the Ball: Child throws and catches ball to a

partner while walking parallel to each other, two metres apart. Repeat but now kicking the ball between them.

General gross motor activities

There are a variety of games and activities that you can do to help your child develop their gross motor skills. All children benefit from active movement of the large muscles in their arms, legs and trunk. Exercise of the muscles promotes strength, endurance, posture, balance and co-ordination. The list below will provide you with some ideas that you and your child can look over and consider those that are most appealing to his/her interests (or add your own!). It is suggested that your child has regular opportunities to participate within gross motor games and activities preferably on a daily basis to help them develop their skills and abilities.



Activity Ideas:

- Running, skipping and hopping.
- Dancing, marching to music.
- Jumping – trampoline.
- Playing at a playground (climbing frames, trapeze bars, swings).
- Bowling.
- Hop scotch.
- Hoop games.
- Racket sports.
- Obstacle courses – crawling under/over and stepping stones.
- Beanbag/Frisbee, catch and throw games. Ball skills – kicking, rolling, bouncing, throwing and catching.
- Swingball.
- Swimming.
- Sitting on a space hopper and maintaining balance whilst watching television or playing a game.



- Lying on tummy on a space hopper doing a puzzle, supporting the body.
- Animal walks – imitating various animals for example, frog leap, bunny hop, bear crawling and crab walk.
- Attending local play grounds, climbing frames and swings.
- Taking part in after school activities such as football, gymnastics, athletics, anchor boys and cubs.
- Riding a bike or going a scooter.
- Walking in parks, beaches, uneven surfaces.
- Woodland walks

Useful websites and resources

Useful websites to help with gross motor activity ideas:

- www.set4sport.com
- www.dayoutwiththekids.co.uk
- www.visitscotland.com

East Ayrshire resources

- www.east-ayrshire.gov.uk/CommunityLifeAndLeisure/TheBuzz.aspx
- www.facebook.com/eavibrantcommunities
- www.galleoncentre.com
- www.centrestagemusictheatre.co.uk
- Steven Mair, Sports Development Officer, 01563 576351
- Active school co-ordinators and sports development officer can be contacted at: Neighbourhoodactivities@east-ayrshire.gov.uk
- Ayrshire Athletics Arena, 01563 555226/555227, aaarena@east-ayrshire.gov.uk

South Ayrshire resources

- www.south-ayrshire.gov.uk/leisure/citadel-leisure-centre
- www.south-ayrshire.gov.uk
- www.prestwicktennisandfitness.co.uk

North Ayrshire resources

- www.kaleisure.com
- www.irvinebaygc.co.uk
- www.carena.org.uk
- www.north-ayrshire.gov.uk/communityfacilities
- www.sportnaac.co.uk
- www.dreamnorthayrshire.com

Contact Information

Children and Young People's Occupational Therapy Services (North)

Rainbow House,
Ayrshire Central Hospital,
Kilwinning Road,
Irvine KA12 8SS
01294 323070

Children and Young People's Occupational Therapy Services (East)

20 Lister Street
Crosshouse Hospital
Kilmarnock, KA2 0BE
01563 826007

Children and Young People's Occupational Therapy Services (South)

Arrol Park Resource Centre
Doonfoot Road
Ayr KA7 4DW
01292 614988

All new requests for assistance for Children and Young People's Occupational Therapy services should be forwarded to:

The Rainbow House Mailbox:
aa-uhb.clinical-rainbowhouse@nhs.net

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