Gross Motor

What You Need to Know
From holding their head up, rolling, sitting, crawling, standing, and eventually walking, infants' gross motor skills are critical developmental building blocks that allow them to interact with objects and people around them. While there are certain developmental milestones that are used to guide understanding of what is considered "typical" for infant gross motor development, it is important to recognize that each infant develops these skills at their own unique pace and rate. One infant, for example, may be able to crawl by 6 months of age, while another may not begin to do so until 9 months, while a third may skip this phase altogether and go straight to walking. All of these are okay! The best way to promote the development of gross motor skills is by providing opportunities for lots of practice. From tummy time with the youngest infants to chances to run and jump for the oldest, let infants explore and test what they can do with their bodies as much as possible!

Things to Consider
For infants, sometimes the simplest of things can play a big role in promoting gross motor development. Just because an infant cannot yet crawl, for example, does not mean that you can't provide opportunities to practice gross motor skills. For young infants, mixing things up by intentionally placing them in different positions (e.g., sitting upright, laying on stomach, or placing into a crawling stance) can go a long way in their development of core strength and muscle coordination. For older infants, encouraging them to push or pull things as they walk can add an extra challenge to something they are already doing on their own.

Development of Gross Motor Skills

Between birth and 9 months, infants may:	Between 8 and 18 months, infants may:
Explore new body positions and movements (e.g., rolling over, sitting, crawling, hitting, or kicking).	Move from crawling to cruising to walking, learning new muscle coordination for each new skill, and how to manage changing ground surfaces.
Use each new posture (e.g., raising head, rolling onto back, and sitting) to learn new ways to explore the environment.	Use body position, balance, and especially movement to explore and examine materials, activities, and spaces.
Respond to sounds and sights in the environment by orienting head/body to understand the information in the event.	Show awareness as an accomplished crawler or walker of new challenges or dangers in the environment (e.g., steep inclines, drop-offs).

Setting the Stage
Activities and materials that support the development of gross motor skills:
- Go outside. Outside is a great place for infants to crawl, walk, or stretch!
- Use music! Encourage bouncing, rocking, and movement of arms and legs to the tune of songs.
- Incorporate imitation games or books with movement (e.g., copy teacher, other infant, or animal movements).
- Include ball play to practice pushing, rolling, throwing, and kicking.
- For younger infants, offer lots of opportunity for tummy time (see Tummy Time Activity Card).
- For older infants, make an obstacle course (e.g., crawl over pillows or blankets, or through boxes or hula hoops).
- Provide opportunities for infants to navigate across different surfaces (i.e., carpet, wood/tile floors, pillows).
- Place preferred items slightly out of reach to encourage children to move to items, reach across midline, or pull themselves up to stand and reach.

OBSERVE	**OBSERVE** Take time to observe where infants are with their gross motor skills. Do some naturally try out new movements on their own, while others may need more explicit encouragement? Who would benefit from extra support? Who is ready to be gently pushed to try new, more challenging moves? What support provided allows them to do just a little more than they could on their own?
FOCUS	**Narrate Gross Motor Movements** Model and narrate infants' (and your own) movements. Use this to acknowledge their use of gross motor skills, but also to explain and demonstrate how to do things. ♦ "(Child), you are crawling toward the box! Let me crawl with you (*while crawling on the floor*)!" ♦ "Will you try to jump with me? One, two, three... jump, jump, jump (*holding hands with the child while jumping*)!" ♦ With a young infant (e.g., during diapering), gently flex their legs in a bicycle movement while they are on their back and narrate, "You are bending your legs!" ♦ "Let's put your braces on to help your feet and ankles feel sturdier when you stand up. That's better!"
SCAFFOLD I	**Promote Autonomy** Provide opportunities for infants to push their limits and try new movements. Your role is to watch carefully and be ready to provide support as-needed in a way that allows them to push a little farther than they could have done on their own. ♦ An infant is struggling to reach a toy on the chair, so you move the toy closer to the edge. ♦ Hold an infant's hands to help them transition from sitting to standing on the floor or your lap. ♦ While pointing, say, "Let's go play with the blocks over there!" Encourage them to scoot, crawl, or walk toward the toys independently and how they choose. If they fall or have difficulty, reassure them, step in to help them readjust and restart, and then encourage them to keep trying on their own (e.g., "You can do it!").
SCAFFOLD II	**Encourage Children to Imitate Movement** Gross motor skills are developed with practice! Encourage infants to imitate: ♦ **Your movements**: While flapping arms, "I'm flapping my arms like a bird! Can you do the same?" ♦ **Infants' movements**: "Let's all bounce to the song like (Child)," while pointing and bouncing. ♦ **Animal movements**: "The puppy walks on four paws. Let's try moving like the puppy."
KEEP IT GOING	Consider what you learned from observing infants on Monday as well as their reaction to your Focus and Scaffolds. Find ways to build the activities in the Setting the Stage into your regular routines.