

# CORE SKILL: MOVE

## Gross Motor



### What You Need to Know

Toddlers love to explore their environment by using gross motor skills such as running, climbing, and balancing. Often, time spent on the playground or dancing in the room is not always viewed equally as important as other, more “academic” skills. But developing physical skills not only allows children to actively explore their environment (which encourages development in all other dimensions of learning), but also cultivates healthy, active, and fit lifestyles. Toddlers are learning that their bodies are capable of amazing things. At times, children can make us a little nervous when they push the limits of their gross motor skills. Safety is critical, but children need to explore and test what they can do with their bodies. Children need lots of opportunities to climb, balance, roll, and jump. That means they might lose their balance or skin a knee in the process.

### Things to Consider

Experts recommend taking kids outside *every day* (when conditions are safe). Being outside connects children with nature and helps them understand their role in the natural world. Fresh air and movement are foundational for all growth and development. Gross motor activities are also an important part of building social relationships. It’s important to provide children opportunities to strengthen these skills so they can participate with peers. So, go outside every day to run, jump, climb, and explore! Make sure children have the right gear for weather (e.g., rain boots and jackets when it’s wet, and hats and gloves when it’s cold). It’s important and worth it!

### Development of Gross Motor Skills

Between 9 and 18 months, children may:	Between 16 and 36 months, children may:
Move to cruising then walking.	Use a variety of complex movements (e.g., throwing, kicking, jumping, climbing, carrying, running, and dancing).
Use muscle coordination.	Balance and control postures (e.g., stooping, or going from sitting to standing to do a task).
Manage changing ground surfaces.	Adjust speed depending on the situation.
Use body position, balance, and movement to explore their world.	Adjust body position to fit spaces.
Show awareness of dangers, such as steep inclines or drop-offs.	

### Setting the Stage

Activities and materials that support the development of gross motor skills:

- ◆ Go outside. Outside is a great place for children to run, climb, crawl, or stretch!
- ◆ Use music and dance with increasingly challenging moves (e.g., jumping, balancing, spinning, or specific dance moves).
- ◆ Make an obstacle course (e.g., balance beams leading to boxes to crawl through, leading to bags to throw).
- ◆ Incorporate movement into transitions (e.g., crawl through a box, hop to the table).
- ◆ Imitation games or books with movement (e.g., copy teacher, other student, or animal movements).
- ◆ Provide frequent movement breaks for children who seek out gross motor movements for sensory input. Prompt children to do five big jumps before morning circle if it’s challenging to participate or encourage them to help you move a heavy box between activities.



## Intentional Teaching Practices to Support Gross Motor Skills

OBSERVE	<b>OBSERVE</b>  Take time to observe where children are with their gross motor skills. Do some children naturally thrive on practicing gross motor skills, while others may need more opportunities? Do some children avoid gross motor activities? Do others seek them out? Who would benefit from extra support? Who is ready to be gently pushed to try new, more challenging moves? What provided support allows the children to do a little more than they could on their own? Can children navigate their environment without tripping or falling?
FOCUS	<b>Narrate Movements</b>  Model and narrate children’s (and your own) movements. Use this to acknowledge use of their skills, but also as a way to explain and demonstrate how to do things. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◆ “I see (Child) is crawling on their hands and knees to get through the box.”</li><li>◆ “You are trying so hard to jump, jump, jump!”</li><li>◆ <b>Demonstrate:</b> “See, I’m flapping my arms like a bird! Can you do the same?” or, “I’m holding my arms out because it helps me keep my balance.”</li></ul>
SCAFFOLD I	<b>Promote Autonomy</b>  Provide opportunity for children to push their limits and try new movements (even if it makes you a little nervous!). 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. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◆ A child is struggling to walk sideways on a balance beam, so you hold their hands so they can complete the move.</li><li>◆ A child wants to climb onto a chair or structure, you are a little nervous, but instead of saying “no,” you stand behind them to keep them safe. On occasion, you help adjust their foot position until they can figure out how to get to the top.</li></ul>
SCAFFOLD II	<b>Encourage Children to Imitate Movements</b>  Gross motor skills are developed with practice! Encourage children to imitate: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◆ <b>Your movements:</b> “I’m spinning my body in a circle! Can you do it?”</li><li>◆ <b>Children’s movements:</b> “Let’s all dance like (Child)!”</li><li>◆ <b>Animal’s movements:</b> “The puppy walks on four paws. Let’s try moving like the puppy.”</li></ul>
KEEP IT GOING	Consider what you learned from observing children 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.