

CORE SKILL: MOVE

Gross Motor



What You Need to Know

Preschoolers are developing gross motor skills (large muscle movements) as they balance, pedal, run, swing, build, or climb. They are increasingly able to perform complex actions and engage in physical activity for longer periods of time. The best way to support this development is to offer ample opportunity for them to move, play, and explore. Your role is to observe where they are and guide their development by introducing new movements and providing in-the-moment adaptations and support. 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 ample opportunity 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 when it's wet, gloves when it's cold).

Development of Gross Motor Skills

Between 36 and 48 months, children may:	Between 48 and 60 months, children may:
Balance (e.g., on one leg, or on a beam) for short periods with some assistance.	Balance (e.g., on one leg, on a beam) for longer periods of time, both when standing still and when moving from one position to another.
Perform some skills (e.g., jumping for height or hopping).	Demonstrate more coordinated movement when engaging in skills (e.g., jumping for height and distance, hopping, or running).
Engage in physical activity that requires strength and stamina for at least brief periods.	Engage in more complex movements (e.g., riding a tricycle) with ease.
Follow direction involving their own position in space with adult support.	Engage in physical activity of increasing intensity for longer periods of time.
Be somewhat aware of own body, space, and relationship to other objects. May have difficulty consistently coordinating motions and interactions with objects and other people.	Show increasing awareness of body, space, and relationship to other objects in ways that allow for more coordinated movements, actions, and interactions with others.
	Follow direction involving their own position in space.

Setting the Stage

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

- ◆ Outside: room to run/hop, tricycles, scooters, climbing equipment, swings, balance beams, things to jump or swing from, tunnels (even a cardboard box), jump ropes, throw/catch balls, push toys, lines to challenge distance jumping.
- ◆ Use music and dance/movement with increasingly challenging moves (e.g., balancing, spinning, faster tempo, shifting directions, and marching).
- ◆ Inside: long hallways for running/hopping, beanbag tosses, building with large blocks, mats for tumbling, traveling up and downstairs, navigating a variety of surfaces and obstacles (i.e., tile, carpet, around tables), open spaces for yoga.
- ◆ Provide visuals to prompt children to perform gross motor tasks appropriately and/or draw attention to obstacles that may require skilled maneuvers. For example, on the playground, hang a visual of using flat feet to prompt a child who walks on their toes to keep their heels down. Or you put bright yellow tape on the floor before a sudden step to prepare children.



Intentional Teaching Practices to Support the Development of Gross Motor Skills

OBSERVE	OBSERVE Take time to observe where children are with their gross motor skills. Do some naturally thrive on practicing gross motor skills, while others may need more opportunities? Who would benefit from extra support? Who is ready to be gently pushed to try new, more challenging moves? What type of support allows them to do just a little more than they could on their own? Do some children seek out gross motor movements while others avoid them?
FOCUS	Narrate Gross Motor Movements Model and narrate children’s (and your own) movements. Use this to acknowledge their use of their skills, but also as a way to explain and demonstrate how to do things. <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ “Wow! You’re jumping backwards, now you’re going faster and faster!”◆ “I see you are keeping your feet still and pulling your elbow back – you’re ready for a big baseball swing!”◆ Demonstrate: “I’m lifting my leg and wrapping it around the other. Whoa, I’m holding my arms out because it helps me keep my balance.”
SCAFFOLD I	Promote Autonomy 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">◆ A child is struggling to get a ball through a basket/hoop so you adapt the game by adding a larger basket/hula hoop to shoot through.◆ A child has mastered rolling a ball to knock down pins, so you move the pins further away to increase the challenge.◆ A child is having difficulty walking up/downstairs using alternating feet. You put a yellow sticker on their right shoe and a red sticker on their left shoe as well as alternating yellow/red stickers along the stairs to prompt them.
SCAFFOLD II	Encourage Children to Imitate Movement Promote movement of large muscles by encouraging children to imitate (e.g., you, other children, animals, wind/weather, or machines/robots). When encouraging them to imitate a <i>new</i> move, begin by using both verbal instructions AND by modeling. Go as slowly as necessary for them to be successful. Then gradually, as they master the move, take away one or the other (e.g., just model or just give verbal instructions).
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.