

Supporting Physical development at home

When you hear the term 'physical development' you will probably think of the benefits that a healthy diet and lots of running around can bring to your child. In fact, physical development is fundamental to every aspect of your child's life. Just how important it is to their all-round progress is recognised in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), where it is described as a **Prime area** of learning and development.



Physical development can be subdivided and defined in various ways. These are the two broad categories of activity:

- **gross motor skills**, which involve using the body's big muscles and include movements such as running, jumping, stretching and other whole body movements
- **fine motor skills**, which use the body's small muscle groups, for example, the hands, fingers, feet and toes and include movements like grabbing, gripping and manipulating.

Sensory development is important too - sight, hearing, taste, touch and smell - and our ability to deal with all the sensory stimulation of the world around us.

Physical development in the EYFS also includes 'self-care' such as brushing your hair and teeth as well as healthy eating.

WHAT ELSE DO I NEED TO KNOW?

Be aware that muscles develop...

- from the inside out, so in a baby's earliest days it is the diaphragm (which helps them breathe) that is the hardest working muscle.
- from top to bottom, so a child's back muscles strengthen before those in their legs.
- from large to small, so a child needs to learn to run and jump and have a strong core and shoulders and upper arms before they can learn to hold a pencil.

There is no hurry! As a parent, you will have watched your child grow and develop, eagerly looking for signs of progress and delighting in new stages. What we tend to forget is that each stage is there for a reason and we shouldn't rush through them. Research into early education shows that if children miss out or hurry through some of these early stages it can affect their learning when they are at school.

What can you do at home?

Rather than a list of must-do activities, you can dip in and out of these prompts and ideas based on your child's current interests and appropriate stage of development.

Fine Motor Skills

Fine motor skills are the precise movements a child makes with their hands, often involving their thumb and index finger. These are small movements which refer to the grip and control of tools such as scissors and pencils. Throughout their day, your child may be encouraged to take part in activities that increase the use of these kinds of movements.

- Pegs, chopsticks or child-friendly tweezers can promote good grip and squeezing to build up the muscle strength in your child's hands. Have a race to see who can pick up the most Pom Poms, small toys or spaghetti strands in a minute.
- Try something new when writing and drawing - why not paint on huge pieces of paper or some old bed sheets? Use twigs or pencils to make marks in sand, shaving foam or mud.
- Encourage your child to use a range of tools including scissors, rolling pins, hole punchers, staplers and child-safe cutlery to build strength and control.
- Explore playdough as a great way for encouraging your child to manipulate materials and use a range of different tools.
- Encourage your child to practise tracing letters in sand, paint and water.
- Provide your child with a range of different coloured and sized pencils, modelling how to hold a pencil correctly and encouraging activities such as name writing.
- Encourage play with construction toys such as Lego, wooden blocks or threading beads.
- Make some jewellery using pasta tubes or Cheerios and a piece of string.

Gross Motor Skills

Gross motor skills are the movements a child makes with their entire body including their arms and legs. These are big movements such as running, jumping and throwing. Through physical development sessions, your child may be encouraged to take part in activities which increase the use of these kinds of movements.

- Skipping ropes, hula hoops, bean bags, small and large balls, bikes and roller skates can further develop your child's hand-eye coordination, balance and spatial awareness.
- Planks of wood, plastic crates and chunky tyres are all great obstacles to create a fun area which promotes moving in different ways.
- Wide open spaces are perfect for encouraging large and fast movements such as racing, throwing or kicking balls, climbing, crawling and balancing.
- Spend some time visiting the park and playing games such as basketball, football or bat and ball to support the development of these skills.
- Play a game such as 'tag' or 'stuck in the mud' in a large open space, encouraging making quick turns.
- Have a kitchen disco... encourage moving in different ways to music, modelling alternative movements such as hopping, skipping and sliding.
- Create an obstacle course around the house, in the garden or at the park.
- Rough-and-tumble games and any activity involving comfortable pressure is good, as well as little jobs around the house like lifting, carrying and sweeping.
- Encourage a strong core and shoulders – a much needed strength for success in writing. You can develop these muscles through active play such as wheelbarrow walks, crab walks, bear walks and mini push-ups. There are plenty of child friendly short clips on YouTube if you need a little inspiration.