

Advice sheet

Balance

Balance is the ability to stay upright, steady and in control of your posture while undertaking a movement activity. Your child needs to have developed good back and tummy muscle strength in order to balance successfully. Balance is an important skill as it helps a child gain confidence and skills with physical movement and coordination. Infants use balance to learn how to crawl, toddlers use it to learn to jump with two feet and kick a ball, pre-schoolers use it to learn how to skip and dress themselves, and children gain skills in sports and games.

Your child should be encouraged to participate in a wide variety of activities to help promote balance and movement skills. Select activities that motivate your child, as this will encourage success.

If you are concerned about your child's balance, request that they access a motor-based activity at school if this is available ie 'Gym Trail'. 'Gym Trail' is an exciting programme delivering motor co-ordination skills and activities, targeting children with motor co-ordination difficulties. It is designed to improve a child's coordination and underlying postural stability and balance.

A child with balance difficulties may:

- Have difficulty negotiating new, unfamiliar and uneven surfaces
- Struggle to sit upright
- Frequently trip or bump into furniture or persons more than you would expect for their age.
- Have difficulties with activities where feet are off the ground
- Feel unsafe going up and down steps and stairs
- Have difficulties using playground equipment
- Struggle to join in physical games with their friends.
- Have difficulties using a scooter or riding a bike
- Be unable to fully participate in PE and Games
- Show poor concentration and attention

Everyday strategies

Encouraging opportunities for your child to experience a wide variety of frequent movement-based activities will help to improve their balance and build up confidence.

Take your child to a local playground regularly and encourage them to use all the outdoor play equipment e.g. swings, slides, balance beams, climbing frames and ladders.

Activities

Encourage the following activities with your child, relevant to age and stage of development:

Walking games

Create different styles of walking e.g., fairy steps, giant steps, rabbit jumps, crab walks, slow moon walks.

Push and pull games-tug of war

Try these in sitting, high kneeling position as well as standing

Balance in crawl position

Let your child practise keeping balance by lifting up one leg or one arm when in a crawling position. Make it more difficult by getting them to lift up a leg and arm at the same time.

Aeroplanes

- Have your child lie on the floor on their tummy. They then need to lift their head, shoulders and arms off the floor
- Count to 10
- Now lift their legs off the floor as well, keeping the legs straight. Count to 10 and relax
- Progress to maintaining this position while lying on their tummy on a therapy ball

Walking along a taped length

- Start off with tram tracks of parallel lines and progress onto single tape line
- Place the tape on the floor and let your child pretend they are a circus performer
- Encourage your child to walk forwards and backwards, heel/toe along the line
- Take turns with your child and keep a score on how many times the line was stepped off
- Make it fun and have prizes

Stepping stones

Place cardboard cut-outs of circles, squares or triangles on the floor. See if your child can follow the course by placing one foot on each "stone". Vary the distance between them.

Standing on one leg

- When standing on one leg, initially hold their hands. Then encourage letting go of your hand support.
- Get your child to try to maintain balance on one leg with hands on hips. Make it more difficult by getting them to swing their free leg then progress to slowly make shapes in the air with their other foot.
- When learning to stand on one leg, get your child to look straight ahead, focus on an object and slowly lift their leg and hold it raised as long as possible.

Hopscotch

Let your child try jumping with both feet together and then move up to hopping on one foot.

Trampoline

It is important to supervise your child at the beginning. You can start with a mini trampoline with a support bar at the front if the child is nervous. If using a large garden trampoline, please ensure that there is a surrounding safety net. Start off sitting and bouncing, then kneeling and standing. Once they have gained confidence they can try:

- Jumping and clapping hands in front, behind the body and over the head
- Jumping with feet apart and then together
- Hopping on alternate feet
- Jumping sideways, forwards and backwards. Twirling around
- Catching a ball while jumping