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Activities to Improve Balance

What is it?

The ability to maintain the body in a controlled position initially when sitting and performing an activity and later when standing and moving.

Why do we need it?

Balance is a foundation skill. A person needs to be able to balance in order to perform a more complex task such as football, skipping and dancing.

Introduce balancing activities with the following three points in mind will support children at their level of ability:

Body Position: A child needs to be able to adjust their balance in many positions, so introduce activities that require the child to balance on all fours, then on their knees, then sitting and then standing. The closer the child is to the ground, the easier it is to balance.

Width of Base: The wider the base the easier it is to balance

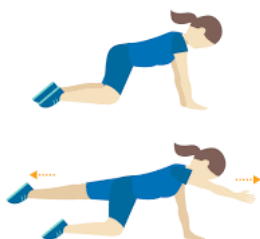
Stability of Surface: A solid surface is easier to sit on than a wobbly surface. Begin an activity on solid ground then gradually begin to use moving surfaces like standing on a small pile of cushions or pillows or a tyre.

Some Suggested Activities:

- **Rope Walking** – Use a large rope, aim to walk along the rope without falling off. Arrange the rope on the floor in different patterns and repeat.
- **Jump in/out Hoops** - with two feet together, with hoops positioned in straight line or scattered. If hoops are different colours, encourage jumping in/out in specific colour sequence. Play this like hopscotch, e.g. throwing bean bag into a hoop, jump into the hoops missing out the hoop with the bean bag, but collecting on the way back.
- **Hopscotch** - is a good simple game for practicing jumping and hopping, both balance tasks.
- **Bean Bag Walk** – place beanbags on the floor in a straight line or pattern and walk on top of them without touching the floor. Simple patterns then increase the challenge.
- **Egg and Spoon** – Walk along carrying a hard boiled egg in a spoon. Increase the challenge by making the spoon smaller and the egg a marble.



- **Walk along a Bench**, try carrying an object e.g. a tray with several empty cardboard/plastic containers each time walking across the bench adding more to the tray. Try simply walking across an upturned bench.
- **Musical Chairs** can develop balance skills if you try to sit down without using your hands. Take your time to do this.
- **Statues** – can you jump from a low box or stool and land, then freeze in that position like a statue.
- **Chalk Lines** – as with the rope activity, draw a straight or patterned line and walk along it without stepping off. Increase the challenge by walking heel to toe, walking backwards or heel to toe backwards walking. Keep a record of how many times you “fall off” and try and improve the score.
- **Balance Crawl** – get into the crawl position (see below) and try lifting and arm or leg off the floor. To increase the challenge try lifting both an arm and a leg off the floor at the same time. Try lifting opposite arm and leg, then swapping over. Can you do this movement fluently?



- **Bouncing Activities** are very good for developing postural adjustments. Try trampolines or small trampets. Bouncy castles and soft play environments are also good and fun. Sit on space hoppers, are great for bouncing round the garden. Try setting up simple obstacle courses e.g. ‘Bounce up the garden through the chairs round the pole at the end and back as quickly as you can.’

Body Awareness is also an important part of balance

- Games such as Simon Says played with eyes open or closed will help to develop an awareness of where their body is.
- Play hokey cokey, listen hard to make sure you move the correct arm or leg, i.e. right or left.
- Discover all the body parts that can ‘bend’. Go through small finger movements and large body movements, e.g. bending at the waist, bending the last joint of the little finger.
- Talk about feet and shoes. Walk on the inside border of feet, on the outside border, on heels and tiptoes. Try foot printing on a long sheet of lining paper or walk on a variety of different textures, e.g. bubble wrap, towel, fake fur, plastic mat.