

Pairing Movement With Learning

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Introduction

Children spend much of their first year learning to move and control their own bodies—lifting their heads, turning over, sitting, crawling, seeing and feeling. Children use all of their senses to explore an object or a space. They learn mostly through movement. Children learn the size of a room by crawling around it. They learn what their bodies can do by moving through space in many ways—rolling, crawling, walking. As children repeatedly practice and perfect these skills, they begin to explore with their eyes as well as their bodies and hands. This learning to move large and small muscles is called *motor development*.

The Importance of Motor Development

Delays in motor development affect all areas of a child's development. Children who cannot touch, feel, or move to explore things in their surroundings may not develop appropriate learning and thinking skills. It is just as true that a child's motor development can enhance development in other areas! This *concept* is a valuable teaching tool in the area of speech and language therapy. It means that doing movement activities can help speech and language learning. Movement activities are fun and easy to incorporate into home and recreational activities.

Movement Activities for Language Development

Following are descriptions of areas the speech and language clinician may work on with your child. Ideas and activities for mastering these concepts by pairing them with movement are included. It is not important how well your child can perform the movement activities described. It is important to simply include movement in a fun and relaxed way to help your child learn language skills.

1. Prepositions/Spatial Concepts

A child learning concepts such as on/off, under/on top of, in front of/in back of, and between can be greatly aided by personal experience. Try to incorporate a variety of positions and movements to accomplish this. You can design an obstacle course for your child to move over, under, around, and through. Your child can:

- Crawl **under** a table, **through** a large box, or **over** a "mountain" of pillows.
- Step **in** and **out** of a large tire, **on** and **off** a stool, or **through** the rungs of a ladder.
- Run **between** two lines or sit down **next** to an object.

To encourage understanding give your child directions about where to move. Use the words you want your child to learn in the activities. Make statements and ask questions. Let your imagination go! There are countless ways to incorporate movement into this area of learning.

2. Left/Right

Have fun learning left-right by using body parts and motor skills. You can start with simple activities such as:

- Standing (kicking, hopping, stomping, etc.) using the right/left foot.
- Pointing (throwing, patting, touching, tapping, etc.) with the right/left hand.
- Balancing on hands and knees (lying on the floor, sitting in a chair, etc.) and lifting the right/left arm or leg.

You can then increase the difficulty by adding more parts to the request:

- Put your right hand on your left knee.
- Put your right foot on the yellow circle and your left foot on the red square!

3. Verbs

Your child's motor abilities can be very helpful in understanding action words. Use the appropriate verbs as you do these activities:

- Have your child show you "jumping," "climbing," "crawling," "running," "kicking," "throwing," or "batting."
- If your child enjoys pretend play, the child can even pantomime activities such as hammering, sweeping or vacuuming.

4. Opposites

Using movement to learn opposites such as big/little is a bit more challenging. Here are some activities that are fun and easy to do:

- Have your child be as **little**/ as **big** as possible. Ask the child to do a **big** jump and a **little** jump.