

Play & Grow

**GROSS MOTOR
EARLY ADVENTURES**



"WATCHING A CHILD MAKES IT OBVIOUS THAT THE DEVELOPMENT OF HIS MIND COMES THROUGH HIS MOVEMENTS."

- MARIA MONTESSORI

Welcome to the "Growing Together" Collection! We have curated this collection of play-based activities and resources designed to help kids develop — all while having fun! While supplies last, we also include a small toy tied to each developmental area at our monthly events. Please supervise your children closely while they are playing with toys to ensure there are no choking hazards.

This resource is also mindful of children with different developmental needs, such as Autism. The activities are designed to be inclusive, offering various ways to engage and support every child's unique journey in emotional development. The age range is 0-5, and the children are chronologically older but developmentally at this age.

Each resource will focus on a type of child development:

- sensory
- gross motor
- fine motor
- cognitive development
- language development
- social-emotional

If you have any questions, the Autism Society Inland Empire is here to help. Our Resource Specialists can be reached by email at info@ieautism.org or by phone at 951.220.6922.

Thank you to the First Five San Bernardino for their generous financial support, which made this project possible. We hope it brings joy, growth, and understanding to your family and helps your child thrive.



Gross Motor Skills

Gross motor skill development involves the large muscles in the arms, legs and torso. Gross motor activities are important to everyday physical activities like walking, running, throwing, lifting, kicking, etc. It also includes eye-hand coordination skills such as ball skills (throwing, catching, kicking). They are critical for developing strength, balance, and coordination, enabling young children to explore their environment and gain independence.



Developing gross motor skills enables children to move effectively in their daily activities. These skills are crucial in building strength and boosting confidence in their physical abilities.

Like adults, kids benefit greatly from exercise and physical activity, which are essential for maintaining a healthy lifestyle at any age. Mastering gross motor skills also prepares children to handle more advanced tasks, such as exploring new playgrounds or participating in team sports. As their body control improves, they naturally grow stronger. Young children thrive when given chances to practice movement, and it's through active exploration that they learn and develop.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR CHILD'S DEVELOPMENT

Noticing what gross motor skills your child is developing helps you understand their unique developmental journey. Every child develops at their own pace, but being aware of milestones can provide valuable insight into how they are building strength, balance, and coordination. It can also help you identify if they need extra encouragement or support in specific areas. Here are some examples of gross motor skills for children in this age range:

- 0–1 year old: Lifting their head, rolling over, sitting up, crawling, and pulling up to stand.
- 1–2 years old: Walking independently, climbing stairs with assistance, and beginning to run or jump.
- 2–3 years old: Kicking a ball, walking backward, climbing, and throwing objects.
- 3–5 years old: Hopping, skipping, riding a tricycle, balancing on one foot, and more complex tasks like climbing playground equipment.

These milestones vary from child to child, but practicing these movements helps them grow stronger, gain confidence, and develop foundational physical abilities.



SIGNS TO WATCH FOR

If a child is not developing gross motor skills appropriately for their age, it can sometimes indicate developmental delays or underlying issues. Here are some signs to look for, categorized by age group, that may suggest a child is not meeting typical gross motor milestones:

For Infants (0–12 months):

- Difficulty lifting their head during tummy time by 3 months.
- Inability to roll over by 6 months.
- Lack of ability to sit unsupported by 8 months.
- Not crawling, scooting, or showing any form of mobility by 10 months.
- Not pulling up to stand or bearing weight on legs by 12 months.

For Toddlers (1–3 years):

- Not walking independently by 18 months.
- Persistent difficulty with balance, frequently falling or stumbling.
- Inability to crawl upstairs with hands and knees by 18 months.
- Lack of interest in climbing, standing, or other exploratory activities.
- Limited or no interest in throwing or kicking objects.

For Preschoolers (3–5 years):

- Struggles to run smoothly or consistently falls while running.
- Difficulty jumping with both feet off the ground by age 3.
- Trouble climbing stairs without help by age 3.
- Poor balance (e.g., cannot stand on one foot briefly by age 4).
- Avoidance of playground equipment, such as swings or slides.
- Inability to pedal a tricycle by age 4.
- Trouble catching or kicking a ball by age 5.

General Signs at Any Age:

- Stiff or floppy muscle tone (rigidity or limpness).
- Tip-toeing when walking.
- Strong preference for one side of the body (e.g., always using the same hand or foot, even before age 2).
- Delayed physical activity compared to peers.
- A lack of interest in active play or seeming overly cautious when moving.
- Signs of frustration or distress when attempting physical activities.



HOW TO SUPPORT A CHILD WITH GROSS MOTOR DELAYS

It's natural to feel concerned if your child struggles with gross motor skills. Every child develops at their own pace, and some may need a little extra help to reach their full potential. Seeking professional support is a loving and proactive way to ensure your child gets the tools and guidance they need to thrive.

Professionals like pediatricians, physical therapists, or occupational therapists have specialized training to understand how children grow and move. They can identify what might be causing delays and provide strategies, activities, and therapies tailored to your child's unique needs. Working with these experts gives your child the best opportunity to build strength, coordination, and confidence.

You can start with your child's doctor. They can evaluate your child's development in all areas and may refer you to a specialist if needed.

Early support can make a big difference. It can help your child catch up with peers, enjoy physical activities, and feel more capable daily. It can also ease your concerns by giving you a clear plan and helping you understand your child's progress. Seeking help is an act of love and care—it's a way to empower your child and set them up for success, no matter their challenges. You're not alone in this journey; compassionate professionals are ready to support you and your family.



Check out our list of pediatricians who have experience with developmental delays:

FUN AND INEXPENSIVE GROSS MOTOR ACTIVITIES

As a parent, you play a key role in supporting your child's fine motor growth. Simple activities like playing with building blocks, threading beads, or letting them help in the kitchen can strengthen these muscles and make learning fun. Encouraging these skills in their early years lays the foundation for success in their daily life and future learning. It's a gift that will serve them for years to come.

We have included ideas for activities you can do at home with a few free or very low-cost items you can purchase from Dollar Tree or other stores.



INFANTS (0–12 MONTHS)



Helping infants develop their motor skills is important for their growth. These activities help babies improve their physical skills and stimulate their brains and senses.

- **Tummy Time:** Start with short sessions and gradually increase the duration to build neck and shoulder strength.
- **Floor Play:** Place toys just out of reach to encourage rolling and movement.
- **Mirror Play:** Use a low mirror to motivate your baby to push up during tummy time.
- **Peekaboo:** Play peekaboo while lying on the floor to encourage your baby to push up and mimic your actions.
- **Crawling Practice:** Use a pop-up tunnel to encourage crawling by placing a favorite toy or person at the end.



TODDLERS 1-2 YEARS



- **Walking Practice:** Use push toys or hold their hand as they learn to walk independently.
- **Walking:** Encourage your toddler to walk independently, which helps with balance and coordination.
- **Climbing:** Allow safe climbing on playground equipment or soft furniture to build strength and problem-solving skills.
- **Running:** Provide open spaces for your toddler to run and explore.
- **Dancing:** Play music and encourage simple movements like clapping, bouncing, or spinning.
- **Outdoor Exploration:** To develop balance, allow them to walk on grass, sand, or uneven terrain.
- **Throwing and Kicking Balls:** Use soft balls to practice throwing and kicking, enhancing hand-eye coordination and leg strength.
- **Dancing:** Play music and dance together to promote rhythm and full-body movement.





TODDLERS 2-3 YEARS

- **Hopping and Jumping:** Encourage hopping on one foot and jumping with both feet to build leg strength and balance.
- **Riding a Tricycle:** Develop coordination and leg muscles by riding a tricycle.
- **Balancing on One Foot:** Practice standing on one foot to improve stability and core strength.
- **Playing Catch:** Enhance hand-eye coordination and reflexes by playing catch with a soft ball.
- **Obstacle Courses:** Set up simple obstacle courses to promote problem-solving and full-body coordination.
- **Bean Bag Toss:** Improve hand-eye coordination and aim by tossing bean bags into a container.
- **Ring Toss:** Develop aim, coordination, and fine motor skills with a ring toss game.
- **Invent Your Own Games:** Create games like "Rescue the Animals" by having your toddler carry items from one place to another to promote balance and coordination.
- **Get Bouncing:** Use a small trampoline or rebounder to practice coordination and strengthen legs and core.
- **Dance Party:** Play "Freeze Dance" with balloons to build hand-eye coordination, balance, core strength, and upper arm strength.



PRESCHOOL 3–5 YEARS

- **Running and Jumping Games:** Play games like "Tag," "Simon Says," or hopscotch.
- **Throwing and Catching:** Use soft balls to practice simple throwing and catching.
- **Riding Toys:** Introduce tricycles, scooters, or balance bikes to develop coordination and leg strength.
- **Playground Activities:** Encourage climbing, sliding, swinging, and balancing on play structures.
- **Obstacle Courses:** Set up simple courses with cones, hoops, or household items to jump over, crawl under, or go around.
- **Water Play:** Let them kick and splash in shallow water or practice walking and balancing on wet surfaces (with supervision).
- **Animal Walks:** Encourage fun movements like hopping like a frog, waddling like a duck, or crawling like a bear.



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