GROSS MOTOR SKILLS

EDUCATIONAL HANDOUT

What is gross motor skills?

Gross motor skills are physical skills that involves the whole body and large muscles to complete an action, like walking and jumping.

Why is gross motor skills important?

Gross motor skills involve the entire body's movements. They affect the body's core areas, like arms and legs, and impact fine motor skills (small muscles in the fingers, hands, and wrists). Gross motor skills are important in daily tasks, such as dressing, handwriting, and sitting in a chair. Gross motor skills improve with play, practice, and repetition as a child grows up. A child needs to experience situations that allow them to move freely and explore their body's physical capabilities.

What does research say?

- 6.7% of children with autism spectrum disorder have gross motor delays.
- Gross motor delays can lead to problems with fine motor abilities.
- Gross motor development may have an impact on a child's cognitive skills as they grow up.

There are building blocks that are necessary to develop gross motor skills. For example:

Muscular strength

The amount of force a muscle can produce against resistance. It describes how strong a child is.

Examples:

- Pull out a chair
- Pick up a backpack
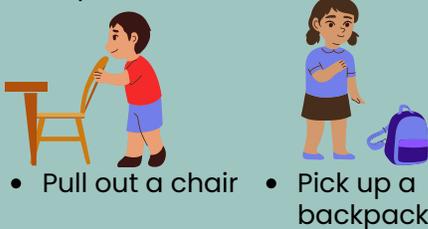
Muscular endurance

Muscles perform repetitive actions for an extended period. It describes how long a child's muscles can work.

Examples:

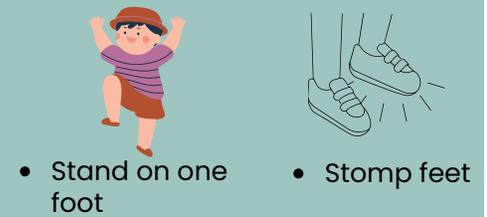- Swim for a longer period
- Run for a longer period

Body awareness

Know and understand where one's body and body parts are in space.

Examples:

- Stand on one foot
- Stomp feet

Balance

Maintain controlled body position to complete a task.

Examples:

- Walk on a balance beam
- Stand on one foot

Coordination

Integrate different parts of the body to work together smoothly.

Examples:

- Ride a bike
- Hopscotch

A child with gross motor problems may look like or experience:

- Avoid physical tasks, like jump rope and play soccer
- Rush to finish a physical task, like put on a shirt
- Be bossy and tell others to do physical task, like play basketball
- Unable to follow a task with multiple steps, like obstacle course
- Tire quickly with physical activity, like run, walk, and play a sport
- Cannot maintain an upright posture when sitting in a chair to do schoolwork
- Struggle to safely carry out a physical movement, like climb

The following are some examples of activities for a child to improve gross motor skills:

Swim

Yoga poses

Dance

Balance on one foot

Play on playground equipment

Walk and climb over unstable surfaces, such as large pillows and multiple blankets

For more information or concerns about your child's gross motor skills, please consult your child's occupational therapist or contact your pediatrician. You may also refer to www.aota.org for additional information.

References

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