

THE Building blocks for learning



Children need movement, says **Alison Harris**, so make your nursery the perfect place for them to practise their skills...



Body Awareness

This series introduces basic skills for nursery aged children in order to prepare them as fully as possible for transition into school.

Skills need to develop like building blocks with each new skill applied on top of firm foundations. Last time, the importance of body awareness was demonstrated. Once this is accomplished, gross motor skills develop at varying speed from child to child.

boys tend to find it harder to sit down at a table and start formal learning. However, the secret is that children need movement and the younger the child, the more they need to move to learn. Many will continue to need high levels of movement throughout their school years to keep them in an optimal state for learning.



Developing gross motor skills

In today's risk averse society, children rarely have the opportunities to freely explore their environment and this impacts on the level of motor skill that children have when starting at nursery. Children learn best through experimentation and self discovery – even through stumbles and falls. By denying them freedom to learn to move by keeping them too safe, we are impacting on natural development.

Gross motor skills develop in a fairly set way. Children rarely miss out stages once they're up and mobile (i.e. you can't run before you can walk). Some children are genetically programmed to be more coordinated than others, and some will be keener to move and explore. Boys typically need more movement than girls, and this can be seen as a barrier to learning as

Gross Motor Skill	Methods to encourage acquisition of skills
Moving around a space and obstacles	A novel and changing environment is met on a daily basis. Tables have new activities to entice the child to move across the room.
Early balance – moving up and down slopes; increasingly adventurous movement; stepping under and over, or up onto different levels	Games where children move around an area, watching out not to bump into others and looking where they are going, create continual new opportunities to integrate their body awareness with gross motor skills.
Increasing movement speed and changing direction	Challenging outdoor areas with slopes and different surfaces; basic outdoor equipment to climb into or over whilst engaging in role play; whole body action songs.
Jumping both feet together (most can jump by age three)	Low-level jumping activities – over a wiggling rope, over a line of sticks on the floor, copying animal jumps to a song.
Coordination of both sides of the body	Learning to push a trike along with both feet; clapping games; follow my leader.
Hopping (most can hop three times on either leg by age three)	Begins with momentary balance on one foot – giant steps or walking like an astronaut on the moon.
Ball Skills	'Trap' catching a large ball; aiming at targets; visual tracking of moving objects.