

Humber Sensory Processing Service

Community Services for Children
aged 0-18 years



Balance and Coordination



We need body awareness to balance and co-ordinate our movements. Being aware of our body position in relation to ourselves, others, and the environment around us, assists us to be more accurate in the way we move our bodies when participating in the activities we do every day. Poor body awareness can result in appearing clumsy, tripping over things, or running into things.

Developmental Stage

Our balance and coordination skills are developed through movements and opportunities in our early years. Most typically, developing children reach milestones for balancing skills between 18 months and 2 years. However, it's important to remember that these skills are constantly developing as the challenges become greater as we get older. It is also important to remember that we are all different and we all develop differently and for some children it can take less or more time to master tasks which require balance and coordination.

Some people may need more support with learning how to complete tasks which require coordination, particularly fine motor tasks, which use lots of small muscles in our hands. Using a hand-over-hand approach may make learning how to do these tasks easier.

Here's how it works:

- The helper places their hands over the learner's hands and gently guides them through the movements needed to complete the task.
- For example, if a child is learning to write or button a shirt, the adult places their hands over the child's hands, showing them how to move in the correct way.

This technique gives the learner the sensation of how a movement should feel, while gradually allowing them to take control as they become more confident and skilled.

Some people may also find it easier to learn about the movements and sensations required in a task by watching videos of other people completing those tasks from a first-person perspective, which they can then copy. The 'Watch Me Do It' Programme has a library of videos to support with this - <https://watchmedoit.mmu.ac.uk/>



Grading

When it comes to practicing balance and coordination it is important to start off with an activity where you feel comfortable, or to meet your child where they are at developmentally. If you start with an activity that is too complex you may lose confidence.

Try an activity which involves balance or coordination where you feel comfortable and over time, make small changes to the activity to make it more challenging. Grading an activity in this way means that you continue to build your balance and coordination skills without becoming overwhelmed.

Strategies *

- With an adult or a friend, try building an obstacle course with a variety of activities, try to plan the course with some activities you enjoy and some that challenge you.
- Drawing a Hopscotch and playing this.
- Throwing a ball underarm at a target.
- Try and balance whilst walking along a line.
- Throwing a ball at a target.
- Playing with a swing ball.
- Balance board.
- Twister.
- Yoga: you may enjoy copying yoga tutorials online.
- Dancing; playing games like musical statues or musical chairs.
- Try animal walks; holding your body weight can also be regulating.
- Playing the floor is lava with stepping stones or balancing from one colour stepping stone to another.
- Practising hula hooping; this could be around your waist, or on your arms or legs.
- Playing with a skipping rope, you could try this alone or with two adults or friends.
- Stand with one foot on a ball or block, reach to the floor to pick up a ball / beanbag and then throw it at a target.



- Shoot a ball into a target overhead (eg basketball / netball hoop).
- Make skittles by putting water or sand into empty plastic bottles and try to knock them over by throwing underarm. You change the amount of strength required by changing the amount of water in the bottle and try placing them at different heights to vary the game (e.g. on a low wall, on an overturned plastic box).
- Climbing on playground equipment; please refer to the sensory opportunities at the play park resource.
- Play mirror games where one person copies the body movements of another (eg Simon Says).
- “Heads and shoulders, knees and toes” game.
- Try a tracing activity; ask an adult to help you trace around your body, whilst you are lying on the floor, then look at the picture and identify each body part.
- Rolling up and unrolling in a blanket or mat on the floor.
- Action songs and rhymes e.g. Hokey Cokey.

Trampoline Ideas

- Using a trampette can be a great way to improve coordination and balance, below are some activities that you can try on your own or with an adult.
- If you find trampolines scary, you could try using a trampette with a handle, or holding onto an adult’s hand.
- Try jumping games which involve jumping backwards and forwards or from side to side with both legs together.
- Jogging for a little bit at a time on the trampette, if you start to feel more confident, you can increase the time you jog for.
- With someone else, play a game of catch whilst you balance on the trampette. Once you are more confident, you could move around whilst playing catch.
- Try hopping; see how many hops you can do on each leg.
- With an adult, try playing a game of ‘Simon Says’ and include different movements for you to copy whilst balancing on the trampette.



*The above strategies should be implemented with caution. It is the responsibility of those involved in supporting the child to be aware of physical limitations and responses and that these may limit the use of equipment and strategies advised.

Bilateral co-ordination

Bilateral coordination means being able to use both sides of the body at the same time in a smooth and controlled way. We use this skill for everyday tasks like going up and down the stairs, swimming, getting dressed, tying shoelaces, running, skipping, and eating.

There are three main ways we move both sides of our body:

1. **Symmetrical movements** – doing the same thing with both sides (like clapping).
2. **Reciprocal movements** – doing opposite movements at the same time (like pedalling a bike).
3. **Leading and supporting movements** – one hand or side does the main action, and the other helps (like writing with one hand while the other holds the paper).

Developing bilateral coordination is important because it helps children choose a dominant hand (left or right) and learn to reach across their body. Children who struggle with this may only use each hand on its own side of the body. For example, they might pick something up with one hand and pass it to the other, instead of reaching across with their stronger hand.

Children need to have good body awareness to develop their bi-lateral co-ordination skills. Body awareness is knowing where our body is in space and knowing how we move.

Activities to develop bilateral co-ordination

- Catching and throwing a ball, starting with a larger ball and gradually making this harder with a smaller ball
- Sand and water play, pouring and filling



- Hopping
- Star jumps
- Commando crawling
- Tracing
- Drawing around stencils and colour in



For more advice and strategies like this, you can visit our website:
sensoryprocessinghub.humber.nhs.uk

Or you can contact us with a question on the email address below:
hnf-tr.humbersensoryprocessingservice@nhs.net

