

ACTIVITIES TO SUPPORT HEALTHY BALANCE

BALANCE / VESTIBULAR SENSE

In general, **balance development** is stimulated by **circular, spinning, or rocking movement**. Movement of the head in any and all directions stimulates movement of fluid in the chambers of the semi-circular canals in the inner ear. These canals are the sensory organs that inform human balance, i.e. the position of the body in relation to the earth and its gravity.

Through the vestibular sense, we experience the relationship of the human being's physical body and the gravitation of the earth. It is through this sense that the human being can know where he or she is in the **three dimensions of space**. This orientation of the human being in these planes of space is already inscribed by the positioning of the semi-circular canals or the inner ear. These are oriented so that each canal indicates a spatial plane—right/left, front/back, and above/below.

A secure and efficient sense of balance gives the human being security and confidence in orientation in space and provides a secure sense of "center" out of which the human being can act out into the world,

Outside, gross-motor activities—

Climbing on a jungle gym, trees, rope or chain ladder

Swinging—in a seated swing or swinging by arms from a bar

Swinging in circles, such as on a tire swing

Hammock swinging

Riding, walking, and/or balancing on a see-saw

Spinning like a top (esp. if a child craves it and/or has history of ear infections)

Jump rope (also for proprioception)

Jumping from a higher to a lower surface

Leap from place to place

Hop scotch (also for proprioception)

Bouncing and catching a ball

Skating / roller blade skating

Scooter riding (also proprioceptive)

Swinging on a rope (hanging by arms—also proprioceptive)

Sliding down a "fireman's pole"

Sliding down an inclined surface (playground slide), sliding down head first when safe

Merry-go-rounds

Hand-over-hand bars

Rolling down hills

Sledding

Inside or Out--

Climbing up and down stairs; walking up and down an elevated beam

Traditional children's ring games

Obstacle courses

Walking on uneven surfaces, such as on river stones, "tippery" rocks

Building and playing in snug "forts"

Balancing and walking on a beam, low fence, large rocks, a log, etc.

Trampoline jumping

Somersaulting

Running in circles

Log rolling

Rocking, such as on a rocking horse or rocking chair

Jumping over a rod

Walk across a rocker board

"Sky chairs" (cloth swinging chair hung from a swivel)

Hanging bar

Note: Many of the activities listed here also involve other sensory realms, such as proprioception/self-movement, full body coordination and motor planning, integrated movement of the spatial planes. Traditional ring games and practical work naturally connect many of these experiences together at one time. These are a rich source for fun and easy ways to encourage and support healthy development.

SELF-MOVEMENT / PROPRIOCEPTIVE SENSE

In general, we stimulate proprioception when we **jump** [coming down the important part here], **push, pull, carry heavy objects, hang by the arms, apply pressure to joints in our limbs, etc.** Self-movement / proprioception give us our experience of **body geography**—this means knowledge where the body parts are in relation to one another. Through body geography we can connect the names of body parts and touch specific locations when asked to in a game. Proprioception helps us to sequence body movements and move with smooth coordination. Proprioceptive sensing helps the human being to move with efficiency and coordination. When self-movement / proprioception has developed well, the child can accomplish a sequence of movements without applying conscious thought and without having to watch the body move. An advanced example of this would be to tie apron strings in a bow behind one's back.

Outside / gross motor activities—

- Playing catch with a ball or bean bag (esp. slightly heavy)—both tossing and catching
- Tumbling on the ground
- Hammering nails into wood
- Sanding
- Sawing
- Hanging from monkey bars
- Pushing or pulling a wagon
- Gardening—digging, shoveling, pulling weeds
- Raking leaves
- Pushing a heavy broom
- Heavy work in general
- Pogo stick jumping
- Building snow forts
- Angels in the snow
- Playing horsey
- Handling / pedaling tricycles and bicycles
- Walking / hiking
- Block stilt walking

Inside activities—

- Building with heavy blocks, i.e. hollow blocks
- Crawling through tunnels of boxes or other confined spaces
- Walking with a bean bag on the head or heavier ones draped on the shoulders
- Walking in an adult's boots or walking with shoe boxes on the feet
- Making a child "sandwich" between two cushions or nap mats; apply pressure on top
- Play dough or clay modeling

◦ yoga bags w/ sand
◦ weighted blanket
◦ pushing cart w/ friend inside
◦ pulling sled

Practical tasks / Domestic tasks

- Self-care in putting on boots and heavy outer wear (also orienting body to get clothing on)
- Opening doors without help
- Carrying or moving heavy objects, such as grocery bags, pails full of water
- Laundering heavy cloths on a wash board
- Wringing water out of a heavy cloth, such as a towel
- Carrying heavy laundry basket
- Hanging wet laundry on a clothes line
- Pouring liquid or dry beans from one container to another
- Pouring water or tea from a pitcher into cups for snack time
- Grinding grain in grain mill
- Stirring a heavy dough or batter
- Kneading bread dough
- Washing and drying dishes
- Heavy work—mopping, carrying mop bucket, etc.
- Washing off table with sponge or cloth
- Watering garden plants with a heavy, water-filled watering can
- Scrubbing the kitchen sink or bathtub
- Scrubbing mud off boots
- Washing a floor with a large sponge
- Washing car with a heavy, sopping sponge or rag
- Wiping down the car with a towel after it is washed
- Household tasks appropriate to the age
- Carding wool

Fine motor activities—

- Tying bows, shoe laces
- String games
- Artistic activities—such as drawing, painting, modeling, cutting, gluing, etc.
- Sewing and other handcrafts, such as knitting and crochet

One-on-one or for the home:

- Rolling up in a blanket (“burrito roll”)
- Brushing a shaggy dog
- Having a pillow fight
- Hugging / gentle rough-housing

Note: Each of the activities listed above involves proprioception. Some also involve other sensory realms, such as balance, eye-hand coordination, motor planning, crossing midline, gross motor coordination, integration of body spatial planes, etc. Common playful and, especially, practical work activities naturally combine many of these aspects together. The more practical life activities are available to the children’s experience, the more multiple aspects of developmental process are supported.

