



Fine and Gross Motor

About fine and gross motor

'Motor skills' describes the ability to control and coordinate movements. This can include fine motor control (e.g. small movements of the fingers and hands) and gross motor control (e.g. large and coordinated movements of the trunk, arms, and legs).

Some children with neurological and developmental disorders have challenges with learning and mastering new motor skills. For example, children with cerebral palsy or acquired brain injury (e.g. following a stroke) might find it challenging to control and coordinate the parts of their bodies which perform fine and gross motor tasks. As an early childhood educator, individual adjustments might need to be made to help support children with fine and gross motor challenges to learn new motor skills.

Evidence-based strategies

Work collaboratively

- **Get more information.** Talk with the child and their parents to find out the child's unique strengths and abilities, any areas they need more support with, and the best methods of communication.
- **Build a relationship with other professionals involved in supporting the child.** Working together can lead to a shared understanding of how best to support the child and to using strategies that are the same in the early childhood education and care setting and other settings such as home.

Practise motor skills

- **Practise fine motor skills regularly.** Fine motor activities could include arts and crafts (e.g. cutting and folding paper, making kites, assembling materials together), manipulating things with fingers (e.g. play dough, clay) and games using fingers (making shadow figures, playing with puppets). Practise these activities regularly.



- **Help children develop movement skills.** Children can improve their gross motor skills (e.g. ability to move around a room) with activities that encourage hopping, galloping, jumping and kicking. These may include obstacles courses, music or dancing. Match activity level of difficulty to each child's skill level. As children become more confident with a skill, gradually make the tasks more difficult. Aim to engage children in active activities every session where possible.
- **Improve object-control.** Bouncing, catching and throwing balls may help children learn how to control objects with their hands. Match activity level of difficulty to each child's skill level, and as children become more confident with a skill, gradually make the tasks more difficult. Aim to have children practise these skills every session where possible.

Tailor how you teach

- **Use music to get children moving.** Music can improve movement ability in children who are blind or low vision. Try "moving to the beat" of an instrument in a safe environment, or letting children adapt how they play an instrument to better fit with their abilities.
- **Allow time for child-directed play and learning.** Consider letting children choose their preferred toys and materials, and provide them with plenty of time to explore them. Some play materials may need to be modified. For example, Velcro added to toys can help the child with motor challenges hold on.
- **Focus on what children can do.** Provide encouragement, especially of children's strengths and achievements. Your attitude can make a difference in children's participation and learning.
- **Remove clutter.** De-cluttering the environment can allow for easy movement for all children with reduced motor skills.

Best practice tips

Consider where things are kept

- Check that books, toys and other materials that encourage play and learning are within reach of the child, especially for children who use wheelchairs or mobility aids. For example, consider having bookshelves at different heights, or taping down paper during craft activities to avoid it slipping away from the child.



Provide plenty of opportunities to practise

- Children with motor challenges may need to practise motor skills many times. Give the child plenty of time to practise with different tasks and different materials so they can learn to use that skill in other situations and settings.

Other considerations

Toileting

- Talk with a child's family and support team about any additional strategies or equipment (e.g. adapted toilet seat, step ladder, railings) that may support the child.

Sleep

- Children with fine and gross motor challenge might need extra support with sleep arrangements, such as getting in and out of where they sleep.

Transitions

- A child with a fine and gross motor challenges may find moving from the early childhood education and care setting to another setting (i.e. another early childhood setting or primary school) challenging.
- For more information about supporting children with disabilities when transitioning to a different education setting, access AllPlay Learn's [transition page](#).

Other co-occurring conditions

- Children with motor skills challenges often experience other co-occurring disorders such as [cerebral palsy](#), [physical disability](#), [developmental delay](#), [autism](#) or [blind or low vision](#).

Relevant resources

Visit our [resources page](#) for a range of resources that can help to create inclusive education environments for children with disabilities and developmental challenges. Some particularly relevant resources for supporting children with motor skills issues include:

- Strengths and abilities communication checklist
- Character strengths poster (A3)