



Groovy Gross Motor Skills

Gross Motor Skills (GMS) involve movements of the large muscles of the arms, legs and torso. Development of gross motor skills and bigger movements involve core stability, crossing the midline and using both sides of the body together.

Gross motor movements also encourage the development of pathways between the left and right hemispheres of the brain, essential for coordinating both eyes, both ears and both hands.

Muscle control generally develops from the top of the body downwards and from the centre outwards, which means that the fingers are one of the last muscles a child will have good control over. Children need a strong core to write, and therefore, they need to develop gross motor control alongside fine motor control.

Writing relies on strong hands and fingers, and therefore, a strong and coordinated core must come first, with shoulders, biceps, triceps, forearms, wrists and hand strength developing in succession. Gross motor skills support the development of other abilities such as balance, coordination, body awareness, stabilising, physical strength and reaction time. It very important for young children to have a range of experiences that develop their gross motor skills and confidence in their own body, as this can have an effect on children's writing ability later on.

Here are some top tips:

- **Tummy Time:** Encourage babies to lie on their tummies to play with toys for increasing periods of time under supervision.
- **Reach and Stretch:** Ensure babies have the space and opportunity to roll, stretch, wriggle and crawl. Place a toy or interesting object just out of reach to encourage the baby to stretch. This not only works all the muscles in the core and arms, but it also develops perseverance and resilience.
- **Building Towers:** Challenge the children to build a tower higher than themselves. Let them stand on something safely to help them reach to the top as it gets taller and taller. Reach up high and stretch to the sky!
- **Ball Games:** Find different ways to pass the ball to each other starting with rolling the ball using hands and then feet, throw and catch, pass the ball over your heads and under your legs, around your body and over and under obstacles. Consider the size of the ball. If they are struggling to catch it then use a larger ball or even a balloon or for further challenge use a tennis ball or smaller.
- **Wheelbarrows:** Push and pull outside. Why not link to gardening or provide the children with a 'job' to transport the mud from one place to another?
- **Tyres:** Push and roll around the outdoor area. Pick them up when they topple over, push up slopes but don't forget to check for wires sticking out before using.
- **Obstacle Course:** Find everyday things such as cushions, sheets, crates, planks and boxes that children can crawl through, move over, squeeze under, balance on or jump off – take this activity either inside or out!
- **Play Hopscotch:** Use chalk to draw squares numbered from 1 to 10 then take turns hopping / jumping from square to square, starting from 1. Move onwards and upwards counting along each number as you go!
- **Balloon Tennis:** Tap and pass the balloon backwards and forwards to each other and see if you can keep it from touching the floor.
- **Bubbles:** Blow lots of bubbles, asking the children to pop the bubbles with only one finger. Could they reach high and low? For more challenge ask them to put one arm behind their back.



- **Wallpaper Play:** Roll out some old wallpaper and provide chunky crayons and / or paint and brushes. Encourage children to lay on their tummies and make big marks using both hands. You can even play different types of music to see how the marks that are made differ.
- **'Hokey Cokey':** Sing other action songs with big movements, such as 'Heads Shoulders Knees and Toes', 'Oranges and Lemons' and the 'Farmer's in His Den' incorporating movements that cross the midline.
- **Parachute Games:** Top 5 Parachute Games For Children In The Early Years - Early Years Careers
- **Lycra:** Pull and move large pieces of stretchy Lycra material. This could be whilst singing rhymes such as 'Row Row' or it could be turned into a game of tug of war. You could add teddies or balls, wait, pull and then flip them up into the air!
- **Baking:** Try some baking! This involves lots of mixing, beating and stirring and of course the end result is super tasty.
- **Water Painting:** Draw large pre-writing shapes (circular, vertical, horizontal, diagonal and square) or chalk letters and numbers around the outdoor area, then let the children wash them away with water and a selection of paint brushes both big and small!
- **'Simon Says...'** is great for encouraging different movements and actions! Stand on one foot, jump up and down, touch your toes, hop three times, stretch your arms up high etc. This can easily be played when lining up or when waiting for lunch to be served.
- **'Animal Walks':** What great fun! Suggest different ways for the children to move, such as jump like a frog, walk like a monkey, stomp like a bear, scuttle like a crab, scurry like a mouse, prowl like a lion, wiggle / slither on your tummy like a snake.
- **'Sports Day Any Day':** Set up and access races such as 'egg and spoon race', 'sack race', 'pass the baton relay', 'obstacle course' etc. Alternatively match your races to festivals or seasons. Why not have a 'Puddle Splashing' race on a rainy day, 'Room on the Broom' race for Halloween or a 'Santa Dash!' at Christmas time.
- **Yoga:** Great for working the whole body and crossing the midline as well as practicing mindfulness and relaxation. Take a look at 'Cosmic Kids' on YouTube for more ideas and inspiration!
- **Movement Breaks with Songs:** Funky Feet Songs including Fizzy Bubbles, Spaghetti Bolognese, Rainy Day, Lark in the Park (www.funkyfeetmusic.co.uk via YouTube), Go Noodle, Jump Start Johnny, Shake Your Sillies Out etc.
- **'The Bean Game':** This is an instant movement game that can be easily played anytime in any space. Remember ...runner bean, jumping bean, beans on toast, string bean, broad bean and jelly bean!
- **Cross Body Exercises:** Play a favourite song and encourage cross body actions such 'left hand to right foot', 'right elbow to left knee', 'Hi-5 a friend to the left or the right', 'right fingers to left toes', 'diagonal Superhero POWs to the left and the right'.

Always remember, the most important thing is for children to move their whole body and strengthen those muscles and have fun whilst doing so! Don't forget to take advantage of any outdoor spaces available to your children ... come rain or shine!

