

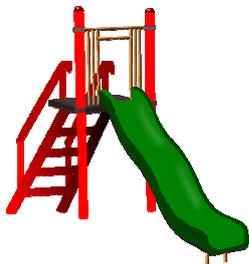


### Developing balance skills

For us to do an activity, whether standing or sitting, we must have adequate balance.

Children with co-ordination difficulties often experience problems with balance. This means that it is more difficult for them to have a stable base from which to control their arms and hands to carry out tasks. E.g. If a child is doing a task while sitting in a chair, they might want to reach out to grasp something. In doing this they move out of their centre of gravity and their body has to adjust their balance accordingly. If the child has difficulties with balance then it may be hard for them to control their trunk, and subsequently hard for them to control their arms and hands.

A child with co-ordination difficulties should be given lots of opportunities to practice balance and movement activities in a non-competitive, non-threatening way.



This often means having access to swings, balance beams, skate/ scooterboards away from other children so they can explore and practise these activities without peer pressure or the fear of being ridiculed. Visiting age-appropriate playgrounds at unpopular times is good for this. Often the most appropriate play areas for balance are the wooden type found at family friendly pubs!

The difficulty of these balance activities should depend on the child's age and abilities. For children with severe difficulties or young children, walking along a line drawn on the floor may be appropriate, others a rope may suffice and for those with mild difficulties may like to try a narrow beam 1-2 feet off the ground.



Repetition of an activity is good but can become quite tedious and you may need to throw in a few challenges. For instance: doing the same activities with bean bag on the head, walking forwards and backwards, timing, measuring how far the child can go before falling off and challenging them to beat this.

Even walking along cracks in the pavement when you are out and about will help the child to become more aware of their balance. Or create stepping stones placed at challenging distances for your child. Sitting the child on an unstable surface will give feedback to the body about balance in a sitting position.

There are extra curricular activities such as most sports, gymnastics, ballet, karate that contain strong elements of balance – be aware that this leaves the child open to direct comparison to their peers and the instructor needs to be aware and understanding of the child's difficulties and how to handle them.

As a parent you will know what sorts of activities your child enjoys and with a little imagination you may be able to find ways to incorporate balance activities in to these. Do not be afraid to experiment with activities but keep them safe and be careful not to lower the child's confidence by giving them activities that are unrealistic and difficult for them to achieve. If you inadvertently do, blame yourself for giving them something too difficult and move on to something easier without any fuss.

**The following activities can help develop balance skills.**

The child should be encouraged to try the task, but not made to do it if they are frightened. Try to make a task easier at first, and then more difficult as they get better at doing it e.g. keep a score, time using a stopwatch.

Walking or standing on uneven surfaces such as a 'lilo' or air mattress, deep dry sand at the beach or loose pebbles.

Musical statues – encouraging large movements so the child has to use balance to keep still when the music stops.

Walk along chalked or taped lines keeping feet on the path, forwards/backwards/sideways, heel-to-toe, taking large steps. Make this harder by putting a rope on the floor instead of the chalked line. Make line straight at first, and then wavy as balance improves.

Ask the child to stand on tiptoes raising heels from the ground for increasing amounts of time. This can be combined with ball skill games such as hitting a target or putting a ball through a hoop.

Place a ladder on the floor and ask the child to step between the spaces, and then progress to standing on the rungs. By raising the ladder off the ground at both ends this activity can be self motivating as it is easy to incorporate in a game (bridge balance beam, walking the plank etc)

Newspaper squares – Stand on a large sheet of newspaper. Try not to fall off the paper, which gets smaller and smaller as it is ripped in half each time.

Twister – (commercially available game).

Sticky numbers – roll a dice and the number that comes up tells you how many body parts should touch the ground.

Try other games with dance mats, or hopping, jumping, keeping still.

Going to the playground gives lots of opportunities to practice balance: climbing the steps to the slide, getting on/off swings and roundabouts and using climbing frames.

