



Work those muscles!

Hayley Still, EYFS specialist and reception teacher at Waverly Prep School in Berkshire, explains the importance of developing strong gross motor skills

With the new EYFS curriculum being used across all early years settings in England, there has been a new focus on the importance of the development of gross and fine motor control. Gross and fine motor experiences develop throughout early childhood and start being developed right from the start of a baby's life.

With sensory explorations, the development of a child's strength, co-ordination and positional awareness can be enhanced through tummy time and crawling, leading up to the progression of walking, jumping, running, balancing and physical play with both adults and objects as a child gets older.

By creating games and providing opportunities for play both indoors and outdoors, adults can support children to develop key skills in gross motor development including: core strength, stability, balance, spatial awareness, co-ordination and agility.

Why is this so important?

Gross motor skills are vital to a child's educational wellbeing, as they provide the foundation for children to progress and develop their concentration, communication, speaking and fine motor skills – which is later linked to those all-important early literacy skills. Before children have the ability to form letters and hold a pencil, they need to have developed their gross motor muscles first.

For example, if a child has underdeveloped shoulder and arm strength, then they will find controlling and holding a pencil uncomfortable and will often show resistance attempting to mark-make and colour. Before a child can sit on a chair or carpet and sustain sitting to listen to a story, they need to have developed their core muscles and strength, otherwise you may find that they have poor listening and attention skills. Before we expect children to use a sustained amount of fine motor

control, we need to work just as hard on supporting gross motor development.

Fine motor control comes and leads from the development of the gross motor muscles in the body. If you have a child in your setting that is not on track to achieve a good level of development by the end of the Reception year – this could be the biggest indicator of why.

It is important to focus, as one of your first on-entry assessments, to check on the child's gross motor skills and know where to start and build upon from there. With physical development being one of the 'Prime Areas' for development within the EYFS, there is a good reason why, as it in turn develops the 'whole child' across all areas. With this in mind, how can we best support the children in our care so they get the best opportunities to thrive and progress with their gross and fine motor development? Here are some ideas of how to support them with this for each age and stage: