



## ACTIVITIES TO INCREASE BALANCE FOR TODDLERS

Does it seem like your toddler spends more time falling on the ground rather than walking? Kids can be experts at falling down. It doesn't matter if they are playing their favorite sport or just walking across the room, your kids learn about the wonders of gravity. Movement is a way children interact with their environment to discover and learn from it. Regardless of cultural or ability level, movement is essential for all children to engage in active play.

The development of motor skills is age-related not age-determined. Children of the same age likely will move differently from one another. Children's background, maturation, physical characteristics, ability to understand, cultural values, behaviors, and special needs are factors that will influence their motor skill development. Motor skills do not just come as birthday presents. They must be nurtured, promoted, and practiced. Teachers, caregivers, and family members are key players to promote and nurture the development of motor skills in all young children.

These four fun exercises can help children improve their balance and learn to better master their bodies.

1. Stand on One Foot – Not every child will be able to master it immediately. If your child is having trouble with this, have them first stand on one foot while keeping the other on a stool. When the child improves, replace the stool with a ball. Be sure to do this with both legs. Always make a game out of it, see how long they can balance on each leg and then have them try it with their eyes closed.
2. Play Hopscotch – This is a classic activity. It's great for developing balance and kids love it.
3. Stand on a Balance Board – These boards can be difficult for anyone. You and your child can take turns trying to stay on the board for as long as you can.
4. Balance a Beanbag: On Your Head – Give your child a beanbag and have them keep the beanbag balanced while walking in different ways. Have your child walk around or dance to music with beanbags balanced.

The key to improving your child's balance, or any other portion of their fitness, is to keep the exercises/games fun. The more they enjoy themselves, the more they'll want to do.

Try these two games to boost your child's physical development.

1. Leaping Lily Pads – You will need a wide open space with hula hoops. The children will become frogs looking for a home and that they play space in front of them is a beautiful pond. Children will jump from the starting point to a lily pad of their choosing. Once they reach a lily pad, then have to jump up and down on the lily pad five times to make it their home. Have them count out loud as they jump. Spread the hula hoops farther apart to increase the distance and amount of physical activity. Add flat pool noodles or

other low obstacles for frogs to hop over. As their skills progress, have children crouch and jump like frogs. Join the play! Be a hungry bird that flies around the pond, trying to capture frogs. If you capture a frog simply say, "Gotcha!" and encourage them to return to play.

2. Bumble Bee Bop – You will need cones or flowers you can make out of construction paper or poster board. Children will fly (run, with arms stretched out) around the play space from flower to flower, saying, Buzzzzzzzzzzzz! Once they reach a flower, they have to stop, touch it, and pretend to eat before flying off to find more flowers. Encourage the bees to fly at varying heights (low, medium, high), speeds (slow, fast) and pathways (straight, zigzag, curved). Join the play! Be a bug catcher – use a hula hoop to capture bees/butterflies. If you capture a bee/butterfly, simply say "Gotcha!" and encourage them to return to play.