

Child's Name _____

Date _____

POSTURAL CONTROL
Gym, Playground, and Extracurricular Practice
BALANCE

Purpose

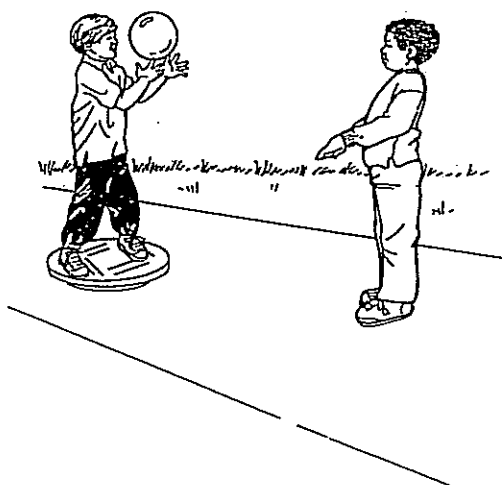
To improve balance

Activities

Many activities commonly presented in gym class, on the playground, and in extracurricular sports help to develop balancing skills. Any activity that places the body off-balance and requires the child to correct the position is helpful.

Games

1. Incorporate standing or hopping on one foot with eyes open or closed into relay races or "follow-the-leader" games.
2. Children stand facing one another across a taped line, elbows bent and palms touching. By straightening the arms and pushing quickly against the other child's hands, each tries to make the other lose balance and move feet.
3. Child stands or sits on a tiltboard (round board that tilts to all sides) and engages in ball activities. Children take turns being IT and standing on the board in the center of a circle of children. Children throw the ball to the person on the board, who throws it back to another child. See how many catches and throws can be accomplished without falling off the board, or time how long a child can maintain balance before another child becomes IT.
4. Tape lines on the floor in the shape of a funnel (angled so the opening is wider at one end than at the other). Children walk one at a time through the funnel without touching either side. Each time this is done, successful children hold hands and try again, until large groups of children are going through together.
5. Place beanbags on the children's heads and encourage the children to keep them there during relay games, skipping, walking, running, and galloping.
6. Call out combinations of body parts, and encourage children to balance on those parts for as long as possible. Children can balance on one leg, right knee and left hand, both hands and one foot, and so on.
7. Set up obstacle courses that include plenty of balancing activities (ladders, hoops to walk around, mats to walk over, ropes, and taped lines and circles to walk on).



Gym and Playground Toys and Equipment

1. Taped lines and circles, balance beams of various heights, railroad ties, and old tires can be used for developing balance. Encourage child to walk on them with hands on hips, touching the heel of the front foot to the toe of the back foot.
2. Equipment with moving surfaces, such as platform swings, balance boards, and tiltboards, can be incorporated into gym or after-school activities. Always provide adult supervision when this kind of equipment is used.
3. Get a large barrel (usually cardboard) from a co-op or other grocery store. Line it with carpeting. This toy is fun for home or school and can be used for many balancing activities, such as sitting on top, standing on top, or rolling by walking on top. (This is an advanced skill and requires adult assistance or supervision.)
4. Hippy Hop Ball® (a large ball with a handle that children bounce on), Pogo Ball® (a disc with a ball in the center, which children stand and bounce on), and large physioballs (for sitting or lying on), are commercially available toys that develop balancing skills.

Sports

Skiing, skating, gymnastics, trampoline, dancing, bicycle riding, and swimming are excellent balancing activities. Children with very poor static (nonmoving) balance often are able to do well in activities such as these which require moving balance. Don't assume that a child who can't stand on one foot (static balance) will not be able to ride a bicycle. For learning to ride a bike, it often helps to practice riding a two-wheeled scooter to develop balance skills before adding the pedaling motion of a bicycle.

Variations and Adaptations

Children with poor balance may find this kind of activity frightening. Teach these activities in an individualized, noncompetitive manner. Provide external support (an adult's hand, a grab bar, or the wall) for as long as necessary. Decrease the amount of external support as skills increase, by having the child merely touch one finger to the wall or an adult's hand. Encourage the child to balance independently as much as possible, but respect the child's fears and take precautions to ensure safety. Use gym mats for balance activities whenever possible.

Balancing is easiest on wide lines on the floor. Progress to thinner and higher balancing surfaces as skill improves.