



HOW TO SUPPORT MOTOR SKILLS

A Whole Body Approach

By Sally McNamara (OT)

As an occupational therapist I am often asked for ideas on how to support or 'fix' one aspect of motor development. For example, a child might hold their pencil incorrectly, have difficulty riding a bike or be unable to dress independently.

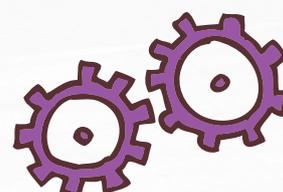
While most people hope there is a quick solution to the problem the truth is that **each motor skill involves a series of complex connections between many different parts of the brain and body.** As a consequence the development of each motor skill requires consideration of the whole body and how it works together.

So while fine motor activities are still important for children who have fine motor delays, only focusing on exposing the child to more fine motor activities will mean that the child is unlikely to make as much progress as one who has been encouraged to participate in activities that support the development of the body as a whole.

Understanding motor skills development (and why is this important?)

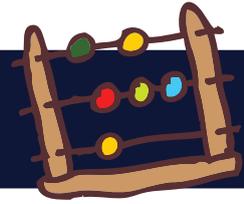
As humans we develop our motor skills in a certain pattern; from the head-down and the inside-out. In other words we gain control of our upper body before our lower body, and we develop control and strength in our trunk (core) before our limbs.

This understanding of how the body develops is very important as it means that if we want to improve fine motor skills (e.g. for activities like hand-writing, cutting, using utensils etc.) then we have to start by working backwards. This involves looking closely at important areas of motor development such as gross motor coordination, the stability of the shoulder and the body's core strength.



A child cannot have distal control without proximal stability. What this means is that if a child's core muscles are weak, if their shoulder joint is unstable and/or if they have difficulty with larger (gross) movements then they will inevitably struggle with their fine motor control.

It is important to always remember that considering motor skills as part a system – rather than in isolation – is critical.



Example of Whole Body Approach

If you know a child who finds certain motor activities challenging then it is important to look at all aspects of their motor development and **determine how other factors might be influencing the body as a whole.** While most issues with pencil control and fine motor coordination are typically easy to identify, gross motor coordination difficulties, reduced shoulder stability and poor core strength can be harder to pick up. The whole approach considers:

1 **Signs of reduced gross motor coordination can include** difficulty crossing the midline of the body (e.g. touching the elbow to the opposite knee), poor balance, slower reaction times, clumsiness, and/or difficulty performing alternating movements or movement sequences.

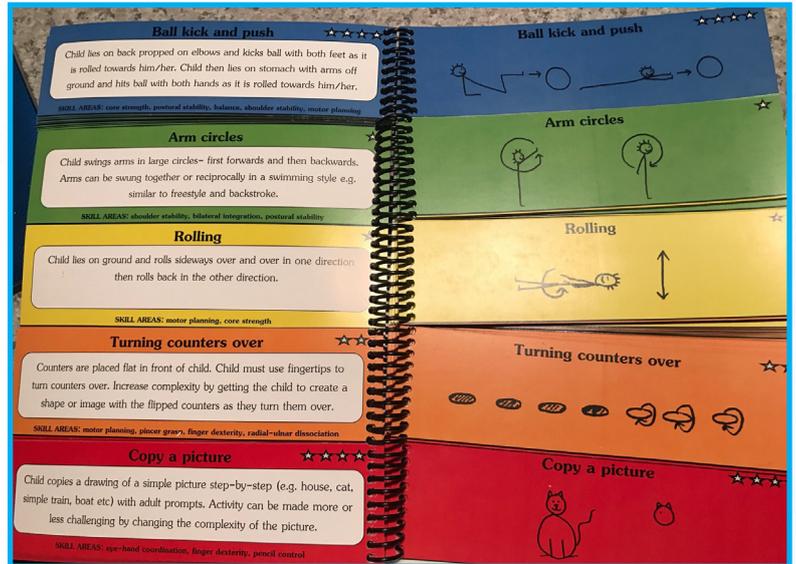
2 **Signs of reduce shoulder stability can include** a tendency to tense or tuck the shoulder during fine motor tasks, difficulty supporting body weight through the arms or trouble keeping arms up in the air, and/or a tendency to use large arm movements instead of smaller hands and finger movements (e.g. whole arm movements when writing).

3 **Signs of reduced core strength can include** slumped or frequently changing posture, difficulty lifting head and limbs off the ground when lying on stomach or back, a tendency to prop on hands or arms when sitting, and/or back or neck pain.

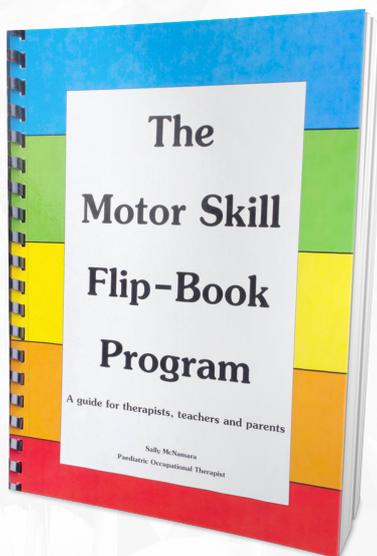


Sue Larkey's Comment

This programme is fantastic as it solves motor issues with quick fun activities. You can give this book to parents/carers or support staff to follow. It has GREAT time-savers that use a whole body approach to motor skills. I love the way it is divided into the whole body activities and covers five key motor skill areas – 'core strength', 'shoulder stability', 'gross motor coordination', 'fine motor coordination' and 'pencil control'. I also love that each of the 100 activities can be mixed and matched quickly and easily for the child to follow during each session.



Great Resource



The Motor Skill Flip-Book Program

By Sally McNamara

Developed by a paediatric occupational therapist in response to demand for quick and easy motor skill programmes for children. Five colour-coded areas of motor development incorporating the whole body; including core strength, shoulder stability, gross motor co-ordination, fine motor co-ordination, and pencil control skills. 100 mix and match activities of varying degrees of difficulty. Beneficial for children who experience handwriting difficulties as well as general coordination and motor development issues.



Making it a success with Sue Larkey!

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