

Introduction

A child's development during the first three years of life is nothing less than miraculous. He begins as a totally dependent infant, relying on his parents to meet all of his physical and emotional needs. Slowly he acquires strength, coordination and endurance which develop his fine and gross motor skills to a point where he can independently act upon his environment. He learns to push himself up while on his belly, reach for toys, roll, sit, crawl and eventually walk.

Self-help skills also develop over the first three years. Holding a bottle, feeding himself using his fingers and graduating to a spoon and fork, undressing and dressing are all activities of daily living that are learned gradually and mastered with repetition and time.

Developing Fine and Gross Motor Skills: Birth to Three was created to facilitate this natural progression of motor skills in both typical and atypical developing children. Its purpose is to

- Provide therapists, healthcare and childcare workers with a comprehensive home exercise program for clients aged birth to three years.
- Educate parents/caregivers about normal development by explaining the long-range benefits of acquiring targeted movements.
- Provide home exercise sheets for transitional movements (actions necessary to go from one position to another) as well as developmental milestones.
- Facilitate normal motor development by providing functional activities for the parent/caregiver to perform with her child.

Organization of the Book

Each page in the book is a reproducible exercise sheet the therapist can photocopy and hand out to the parent or caregiver. On the top of each page is a small notation that states whether the activity focuses on a *fine motor* (FM) skill or a *gross motor* (GM) skill. Next to that is the age range at which a child normally accomplishes the particular movement that is the focus of the exercise. For therapists working with children who are moderately to severely delayed, age ranges can be a sensitive topic. It is difficult to give a parent of a two year old who needs to work on head control a handout that states this activity is normally achieved at three to six months. If the therapist feels that the parent will be too devastated by seeing the normal age range for the activity, she may block out the age level on the heading before handing the sheet to the parent. If the age level is left on the sheet however, it can be a good opportunity to educate the parent/caregiver about the severity of the child's delay. The parent/caregiver may be more open to discussion about how to improve motor skills using appropriate therapeutic interventions.

The statement at the bottom of each page, "For your baby's safety, provide close supervision for all exercises and activities," is a reminder that whoever is working with the child

needs to exercise care while carrying out the activities. She must be ready to provide support if the child should lose his balance or need other assistance.

Located at the top of the page is the **title** of the specific movement addressed in the hand-out. It is stated in correct medical terminology while its description under **Desired Movement** is written in layperson's language. The purpose of using medical language in the title is to teach the parent/caregiver the terms a physician, therapist or other health-care provider might use during visits or in their documentation. The *desired movement* is explained in a simple, positive manner to aid understanding and to encourage the parent or caregiver to perform the activity with her child.

The section **How Does This Movement Help Your Child** assists the parent/caregiver to understand the importance of the desired movement in overall development. If the caregiver understands why she is asked to perform certain activities, chances are greater that she will comply with the exercise program.

The **illustration** section helps the parent or caregiver learn by presenting a visualization of the desired movement. This picture is also helpful for caregivers who are poor readers or who have difficulty understanding English.

How to Incorporate This Into Your Daily Routine is a crucial part of the home exercise program. Parents are overwhelmed with a multitude of daily tasks, not only those related to rearing their child, but also those involving jobs and other family members. Add to this the typical tasks of daily living—cooking, cleaning, shopping, etc., and parents usually don't have a solid thirty to sixty minutes to devote to "exercising" their child. They may feel frustrated and inadequate if they cannot execute the assigned daily home exercise program. When a therapeutic intervention can be blended into a normal, daily activity, both the child and parent benefit.

What To Expect Next is always on a caregiver's mind. Parents are constantly struggling with the questions of "what is normal?", "should he be doing this?" and "what should he be doing next?" This section is written to assure the parent that normal development comes in small steps and to assist with recognizing and working toward these increments of development. ©

At the end of the book is an **Appendix** which includes reproducible handouts on the topics of *Child-Proofing the Home*, *Car Seat Safety* and *Age Appropriate Toys*. We have found that these handouts contain information that is of great value to a parent who is living and working with a young child as he develops motor skills.

Helping the Parent/Caregiver Facilitate Motor Development

There are many ways that a parent can facilitate fine and gross motor development. Suggestions are listed on the next page. Be sure to share this information with parents who are going to be helping their children at home.

Verbal Encouragement The voice is a powerful tool. When soft, low and monotone, its effect can be calming. When new motor skills are introduced, such as when a child is attempting to roll or put a puzzle piece in a hole, the child's frustration level can increase. A calming voice can be used to reduce the child's (and parent's) stress and assist him in completing the activity confidently.

When the voice sounds excited and louder than normal with varied fluctuations and intonations, it acts as a facilitator and can be used when the child needs some extra adrenaline pumping through his system in order to complete an activity. This "cheerleading" voice is appropriate to use when encouraging a toddler to take his first steps, "Come on, you can do it!" or when playing finger games or singing songs, "Peekaboo, I see you!"

Talking through an activity also helps to reinforce the learning process. For example, when showing your child how to put shapes into a shape sorter, describe what you are doing while you perform the task. "I'm going to put the red circle in the circle hole. Now you put the red circle in the circle hole. Good job!"

Visual Encouragement The benefits of sight begin immediately after birth and continue throughout life. An infant will look intently at his mother's face while nursing or drinking from a bottle, noting the various expressions she gives him. When she moves her face in front of him and then to his side, she encourages him to track her movements using his eyes. The baby's fascination with the face becomes replaced with curiosity for toys and other objects. Initially, objects with sharp contrasting colors such as black and white are easier for the baby to focus on. You can keep this in mind when you are trying to interest a very young child in an activity. Later, toys that are colorful, made in a variety of shapes or that light up will attract a child's attention.

Another way we can assist a child through the sense of sight is by having him watch us demonstrate a task. When asking a child to stand on one foot, show him how to do it before asking him to. Say "Look what I can do. Can you do this?" Children observe and model adult behaviors and learn in this manner.

Tactile Encouragement Tactile means "touch," and often a child will benefit if you use your hands to guide him through a task. This might mean holding him in a secure position while he plays or learns a new transitional movement such as pushing himself into a sitting position. Other times he will need you to place your hands over his during an activity and guide him through the motions. Activities such as feeding, drawing or dressing often require this type of assistance. Sometimes it is appropriate for the child to use your body as a support, such as allowing him to hold onto you when pulling up to standing.

Encouraging and facilitating fine and gross motor development is fascinating because it allows you to intently observe the remarkable process of growth in a child. It can also be frustrating because each child is unique and will not respond like every other child. Consequently, therapy will take different approaches and will present new challenges in each individual. Helping the parents and caregivers of your clients work at home can be very gratifying. It is always our ultimate goal to see carryover in the natural environment.