

FEATURE FOCUS: Fine Motor Skills and Hand-Eye Coordination



Many children begin Early Years education unable to perform basic activities such as drawing, colouring, cutting or gluing. They simply don't have the hand strength, coordination or dexterity they need to grasp a crayon, handle scissors or squeeze glue from a bottle. Without these physical abilities, children may struggle to master more complex tasks such as writing and tool-use, and may not feel confident taking part in some activities in later life. In other words, there's a lot at stake.

TWO IMPORTANT SKILLS LIE AT THE ROOT OF THESE ISSUES.

1. Fine motor skills.

These are precise movements that use the small muscles of the fingers, toes, wrists, lips, and tongue. They are essential for children to be able to do things such as colour in, do up a button or pick up a small object.

2. Hand-eye coordination.

Here, vision and proprioception (the sense of where our arms, hands and fingers are in space) work together so that we can reach and grasp. Children need good hand-eye coordination to do things such as feed themselves, handle a toy and catch a ball.

Balanceability's approach to learning to cycle helps children develop and refine both fine motor skills and hand-eye coordination. We often hear feedback from staff who notice an improvement in individual children.

Fine motor skills: Braking.

Unlike most balance bikes, all Balanceability bikes have brakes. Braking safely is quite a complex competency. It involves using hand and finger muscles to squeeze the brake, adjusting how much pressure to apply and how quickly, and knowing how to release the brake.

Children first learn how to use the brakes while standing next to the bike. They then practise sitting on the stationary bike and squeezing the brakes, which improves reaction time and muscle memory. The child can then walk (and later glide) on the bike and brake when asked to do so, at a Balanceability 'Stop' sign, for example, or in response to an instruction.

The child should be able to apply the brake steadily when gliding to slow the bike almost to a stop. You can create an obstacle course with Balanceability cones to increase the challenge. Eventually, braking becomes easier as the child's hand and finger muscles get stronger and muscle memory improves, greatly improving their fine motor skills.

Hand-eye coordination: Beanbags and Hoops

Ask the child to sit on the floor a few feet away from you. Throw a Balanceability beanbag towards them, aiming for their lap. Tell the child to use their eyes to follow the beanbag as you throw it, and to try to touch it (they may not be able to catch it at first).

Start with easy throws, to increase the child's confidence. Then you can gradually throw the beanbags slightly higher or lower, or to the child's left or right. This will encourage the child to lean forwards, stretch up or down, or reach sideways. When the child is more confident, you can ask them to stand up, and repeat the game – again, trying to touch the beanbag rather than catch it, at least in the first instance.

You can switch this activity around: put a marker on the ground (you can use anything) and ask the child to throw bean bags either in front or beyond the marker. This helps them to judge distance, balance and the amount of effort they need. They can start off standing on the ground, and – if appropriate – progress to balancing on a 'river stone' or even balancing a second beanbag on their head to do this.

These are great ways to get them to learn how to keep their torso stable and fine motor skills also give children a sense of mastery – doing something for themselves – and develop a sense of independence.

So remember to celebrate success together!



For more information visit our website or email:
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