



## WEE LEARN – Gross Motor Development

Gross motor skills involve the large muscles of the body that enable such functions as walking, kicking, sitting upright, lifting, and throwing a ball. A child's gross motor skills depend on both muscle tone and strength. Gross motor abilities share connections with other physical functions. A child's ability to maintain upper body support, for example, will affect his ability to write.

Encouraging gross motor skills requires a safe, open play space, peers to interact with, and adult supervision. Helping a child succeed in gross motor tasks requires patience and opportunities for a child to practice desired skills. Parents and Providers must understand the child's level of development before helping him or her master gross motor skills. Children reach developmental milestones at different rates. Pushing a child to perform a task that is impossible due to development status promotes frustration and disappointment. Children should be allowed to acquire these skills at their own pace.





## WEE BEGINNERS 0-18 months

The first gross motor skill infants learn usually is to lift their heads and shoulders before they can sit up, which, in turn, precedes standing and walking. Lifting the head is usually followed by head control.

Although they are born with virtually no head or neck control, most infants can lift their heads to a 45-degree angle by the age of four to six weeks, and they can lift both their head and chest at an average age of eight weeks.

One of the major tasks in gross motor development is locomotion, the ability to move from one place to another. Infants progress gradually from rolling to creeping on their stomachs, and dragging their legs behind them to actual crawling. While infants are learning these temporary means of locomotion, they are gradually becoming able to support increasing amounts of weight while in a standing position. In the second half-year of life, babies begin pulling themselves up on furniture and other stationary objects. By the ages of 28 to 54 weeks, on average, they begin navigating a room in an upright position by holding on to the furniture to keep their balance. Eventually, they are able to walk while holding on to an adult with both hands and then with only one.





## WEE EXPLORERS 18-3

Wee Explorers are usually very physically active. By the age of two years, children have begun to develop a variety of gross motor skills. They can run fairly well and negotiate stairs holding on to a banister with one hand and putting both feet on each step before going on to the next one. Most children this age climb and have some ability to kick and throw a ball. By the age of three, children walk with good posture and without watching their feet. They can also walk backwards and run with enough control for sudden stops or changes of direction. They can hop, stand on one foot, and negotiate the rungs of a jungle gym. They can walk up stairs alternating feet but usually still walk down putting both feet on each step. Other achievements include riding a tricycle and throwing a ball, although they have trouble catching it because they hold their arms out in front of their bodies no matter what direction the ball comes from.







## WEE BUILDERS 3-4

Wee Builders can typically balance or hop on one foot, jump forward and backward over objects, and climb and descend stairs alternating feet. They can bounce and catch balls and throw accurately. Some Wee Builders can also skip. Children this age have gained an increased degree of self-consciousness about their motor activities that leads to increased feelings of pride and success when they master a new skill. However, it can also create feelings of inadequacy when they think they have failed. This need for success can also lead them to try daring activities beyond their abilities, so they need to be monitored especially carefully.





## WEE LEARNERS 4-5

Children at this stage are developing quickly and learn a lot from their experiences and from their play environment. They are beginning to gallop, hop forward, throw a ball 3-4 meters overhand, and kick a large rolling ball. Wee Learners can go up and down the stairs alone in adult fashion (i.e., taking one step at a time). Their running continues to smooth out and increase in speed. Children of this age can also skip and add spin to their throws. They also have more control when riding their tricycles (or bicycles), and can ride faster.





## WEE EXPERTS 5-6

During this stage Wee Experts are continuing to refine earlier skills. They're running even faster and can start to ride bicycles with training wheels for added stability. In addition, they can step sideways. Wee Experts begin mastering new forms of physical play such as the jungle gym, and begin to use the see-saw, slide, and swing on their own. They often start jumping rope, skating, hitting balls with bats, and so on. Many children of this age enjoy learning to play organized sports such as soccer, basketball, t-ball or swimming. In addition, Wee Experts often like to participate in physical extracurricular activities such as karate, gymnastics, or dance. Gross motor skills are clearly important to develop in the Wee Expert, because they encourage him to be focused, adventurous, and playful.







## WEE MENTORS 6+

Wee Mentors who are not going through the rapid, unsettling growth spurts of early childhood or adolescence are quite skilled at controlling their bodies. They are generally good at a wide variety of physical activities, although the ability varies according to the level of maturation and the physique of a child. Motor skills are mostly equal in boys and girls at this stage, except that boys have more forearm strength and girls have greater flexibility. Wee Mentors can skip, jump rope, catch a bounced ball, walk on their tiptoes, balance on one foot for over eight seconds, and engage in beginning acrobatics. Many can even ride a small two-wheel bicycle. Games that are well suited to the motor skills of Wee Mentor include kick ball, dodge ball, and team relay races.

