

Baby Brain Development – Learning Through Movement

Babies are meant to move. Research confirms that physical movement plays a crucial role in the creation of nerve cell networks. The very act of crawling, handling, looking and communicating builds neural connections in infant brains. The more babies move, the more information they are gathering about themselves and the world around them. Spending too much time sedentary in car seats, boosters, buggies and bouncy seats has consequences to a child's cognitive and gross motor development.

The latest guidelines from the chief medical officers recommend that infants less than 1 years old should be

- physically active several times every day in a variety of ways, including interactive floor-based activity, e.g. crawling.
- For infants not yet mobile, this includes at least 30 minutes of tummy time spread throughout the day while awake (and other movements such as reaching and grasping, pushing and pulling themselves independently, or rolling over); more is better.

A baby needs:

- to use all their senses to learn and develop including having bare feet to explore and feel
- plenty of floor time during the nursery day on a safe, uncluttered floor to practice crawling, creeping, cruising and tumbling
- to use their bodies, apply their current muscle control and practice their developing movement skills
- developmentally appropriate resources that promote active play and stimulate a variety of muscle skills such as rolling, crawling, walking, balancing, climbing and ball play
- secure points within the environment to pull themselves upwards to an upright position
- positive interactions throughout the day with an adult who watches, joins in, encourages and nurtures.

Role of the adult

Practitioners are the most important resource for babies. When a baby relates fully to their adult they will learn through the relationship.

Baby room practitioners need:

- to be tuned in to their babies individual needs and moods - be someone who soothes them when tired, active when they are feeling playful and reassuring when they feel frightened.
- Initiate verbal and physical play
- to be responsive when an infant initiates interaction
- offer different kinds of movement e.g. twirling, bouncing, lifts and drops and swings.
- Lay alongside or in front of infants to encourage them to extend their head and bodies to roll over and move.



Tummy time is important for both physical and neurological development

Ideas to support movement and healthy brain development

- Blow Bubbles – babies will watch, reach, grasp and pop them and develop their hand-eye coordination
- Rolling Over – add an incentive for your baby to roll such as a favourite toy. Once their attention is engaged, move the toy from side to side, encouraging them to reach for it or leave it just out of reach
- Large cardboard boxes to sit, hide, crawl and toddle in.
- Try tummy time on an exercise ball – support your hand on the infants back or bottom, roll gently forward and backward
- For creeping and crawling have a variety of large blocks of differing heights (Blocks covered in carpet or a quilt, soft play blocks, cushions, bean bags) to crawl over.

Reflection: How do you support infants to be active for most of the day in your setting?