



Moving with Balance & Control

Movement requires children to balance and control their body. Children must master these skills before they can learn the harder skills that are needed to write, join in games, or play sports. **Balance** is managing the body's position – either in place or while moving. Balance is learned and develops with experience and practice. **Control** means to move the body in a skillful way. Good muscle control is required to use writing tools (pencils, crayons, children's scissors) and play objects (balls, bats, bikes, roller skates, etc.). Help your child learn balance and control:

YOUR INFANT (birth to 2 years old):

- Set up a short, safe obstacle course with pillows. Let your infant crawl over and around the pillows.
- Encourage your walking infant to push, pull and carry lightweight objects. Young children love to try to push and pull wagons, strollers, or "tyke bikes." Try asking: "Can you bring me the cute stuffed animal?"

YOUR TODDLER (2-3 year olds):

- Let your child walk along raised curbs – pretend they are balance beams.
- Have your child practice standing on one foot with her hands at her side or outstretched. Time her. Then, see if she can stand longer on the other foot. Announce which foot is the winner! Try again. If this is too difficult for your child, have your child stand with one foot on the ground and the other foot resting on a ball. Or, ask your child to see how long she can sit still on a ball without moving.¹
- Try a *Balance Race*. Have your child hold a ball or beanbag with both hands between his legs and walk around. Once he is able to move quickly in this position, compete in a race.²

YOUR PRESCHOOLER (4 year olds):

- Go sledding, ride a bike, roller skate, get on a scooter, or use a skateboard with your child.
- Have your child try walking with stilts, "EZ Steppers" or "Clompers." Or, make your own version of clompers from coffee cans and rope.
- Have your child place a beanbag on her head and walk around, trying to keep the beanbag balanced on her head. When that becomes too easy, have her slowly run around the yard or play area, while keeping the beanbag on her head.³
- Walk a tightrope. Challenge your child to walk along a rope or long piece of tape positioned in a straight line on the ground, trying not to have his feet step off the line. As balance improves, change the line to a zigzag, curve, or circle. Or, place beanbags along the line for him to reach to pick them up along the way – without her feet stepping off the line!

Book Suggestion

Lady Bug Girl & Bumble Bee Boy by Jacky Davis
Thai Chi for Kids: Move with the Animals by Stuart Alve Olson

¹ Day, Cindy. "Children's Static Balance Activities." <http://www.ehow.com/list_6942798_children_s-static-balance-activities.html#ixzz1xPlh88dd>

² Prevent Child Obesity 101. <<http://preventchildobesity101.com>>

³ Prevent Child Obesity 101. <<http://preventchildobesity101.com>>