

ECT March 2007 free

Infants and Toddlers

“Baby Moves”

Supporting babies’ physical development

By Alice Sterling Honig, Ph. D.

Swiping, Batting, Pushing!

By three to four months of age, most babies placed on their tummies on a safe, warm surface push down with their arms and raise their chests, so that they can turn their heads to look about at the world around them. By five months, babies stretch both feet and hands upward in order to swipe at interesting mobiles placed overhead. At seven to nine months, babies placed on the floor will push up both arms and legs and rock back and forth as if doing preliminary exercises in preparation for their first efforts at learning to creep or crawl across a floor.

Place a baby on the carpet near a sturdy couch and, by 10 to 13 months, that baby will push up to standing, holding on firmly to the couch, even if wobbly. Babies practice that movement over and over.

Moving with Joy

Babies trying to master getting into an upright position often plop down. With experience, they lower themselves with increasing body movement control, back to the floor. Soon they try cruising along, while holding on to the couch. And of course, nothing makes babies feel more victoriously in charge of their own body movements than being able to launch out into space and take those first toddling steps with legs spread wide apart for balance. At first, babies tumble and even fall splat on the floor. But they are determined to move out into space while upright. So they try and try again in almost giddy delight with newfound movement skills, relying on us to support and protect them during these attempts.

Coordinating Movements

Toddlers are learning to use their exhilarating new locomotion skills to coordinate several bodily motions at once. Toddlers walk and manage to turn around a corner without falling. They manage to lean down and pick up a large, light ball and carry it across the room. They learn to negotiate not only climbing up a flight of stairs, but manage to figure out how to get down, with the help of an adult. A toddler delighting in the newfound ability of stair climbing, but scared of the descent, will appreciate an adult’s firm lesson—tush first!—to help the toddler turn his body at the top, and clamber down using arms and legs to grip the stairs while descending safely. It is important for the adult to follow the toddler closely as these new stair-climbing adventures begin. Learning to not only ascend safely, but also descend, takes lots of practice, skill, and bravery on the part of very young children.

Combining Music and Movement

Toddlers love it when music and movement are combined. They eagerly participate in all the movements for “The Wheels on the Bus Go Round and Round.”

They cheerfully join hands for “Ring Around the Rosie.” However, their hand clasps may be brief and the circle may be broken well before the little ones tumble down joyfully as a teacher sings “All fall down!” Toddlers will enjoy carrying out movements of different animals, such as hopping like a bunny or galloping like a “horsey.” Here are some activities to try to foster babies’ physical development:

Infants: **Hang an attractive, safe mobile**, such as nursery birds that flutter when set in motion, over the crib. A baby from four to six months old will eye the birds, and start to move hands and feet. As baby’s limbs contact the mobile and he sees the interesting spectacle in the air, he will use more and more vigorous movements to keep the mobile birds in motion. Try placing the mobile where the legs can kick the mobile. **Make colorful yarn balls** by winding thick yarn around and around a cardboard circle with a hole at the center. After the yarn ball is finished, snip out the cardboard and attach the yarn ball to a thick yarn piece and hang it from the ceiling. Place the baby under the swinging yarn ball and let him enjoy batting at the yarn ball as it moves like a pendulum. **Create a carpeted incline** in the infant room, so that babies can move upward at a comfortable angle. At the top of the incline, at eye level, place a large, safe mirror. A baby gets the reward of seeing his own face in the mirror at the top of the incline. **Provide a sturdy couch** with textured fabric so that a baby can grip the surface as he practices raising and lowering himself to an upright position.

Toddlers: **Provide rocking boat/steps equipment** for toddlers to master movements. Toddlers can rock their bodies when in the rocking boat. They are brave enough to try a few steps upward when you turn the equipment upside down and provide the steps. At first, toddlers may feel more secure to creep rather than walk up the few steps. As they practice, they gain more bodily assurance and will be willing to walk the steps. **Provide large, light balls** for toddlers to try rolling and throwing. Coordinating upper body motions to get a ball to go in the direction and as far as one wants takes lots of effort and practice. Outdoors, **provide plastic pails and shovels** for toddlers. As they dig into dirt or sand, fill up pails, and pour out water or sand, toddlers are learning to coordinate large muscle movements with finer muscle movements of the hands. ECT