

Engaging two year olds through fun and creative play: What children need to do.

Jasmine Pasch 2014

Practical workshop: BOING, WHOOOSH, ROLY POLY.

Toddlers need plenty of **balance practice** once they are up and walking. Each of the three semi-circular canals in the inner ear respond to movement in different planes. Types of movement enjoyed by toddlers and young children that help train the balance mechanism or vestibular system include:

BOING... up and down movement on the vertical axis such as being bounced on the knee, being lifted up and down in the air or tossed high in the air, bouncing on the bed, hanging upside down, climbing and jumping off, hopping, skipping and jumping, playing on a see saw, going on a bouncy castle, small trampoline or soft play shape.

WHOOOSH... to and fro movement such as being rocked side to side, rocking forwards and backwards on hands and knees, running, starting and stopping, swinging, going on a zip wire, using bikes, scooters and slides, sliding down stairs on your bottom.

ROLY POLY... movement where the body rotates such as being twirled around, rolling over, spinning round on your bottom, spinning around a pole, dancing, rolling down a hill and doing somersaults.

It is worth mentioning that children do not get as dizzy as adults fear they will as the vestibular fluid in the inner ear is thinner.

Toddlers often want to do more than they are able to, so need support and encouragement, but protection from danger.

They also relish using their strength so enjoy vigorous **PUSH AND PULL** activities like climbing. This engages their proprioceptive system which helps them to get to know their bodies from the inside. Rough and tumble play is an enjoyable activity for them with their parents or carers. Adults need to set some rules so no one gets hurt.

Although they are up and walking, **creeping on the hands and knees** to get along is still a neurologically useful activity for them, so encourage this too for example by using play tunnels, cardboard boxes, and setting up activities on the floor.

Being **boisterous and noisy** is all part of being a toddler, and is to be welcomed and encouraged. Knocking down towers, and using pillows and cushions for squashing and hiding games, and getting puffed out with exertion is good fun, and much enjoyed.

Encourage parents and practitioners to remove socks and shoes, and restrictive clothing. As toddlers can move about at speed, though their balance is still maturing, slipping over must be prevented and bare feet are the safest option.



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Engaging two year olds through fun and creative play: What adults need to do

- Encourage noisy play, laughter and sounds with movement activities, e.g. “whoooosh”, “whoooo”, “wheee”
- “Shhhhh” shuts down sound making, and “sit still/stop being silly” discourages playful, spontaneous movement
- Producing sounds is a motor skill involving air flow, and tongue lips and teeth in “mouth posture”
- Listen and look
- Adult attentiveness encourages children to communicate in sound and in movement
- It is easy to dominate children’s play and language development with too much adult talk, and too many instructions, particularly “Don’t do this or that”
- Voicing over can be intrusive, especially if we misinterpret what is happening (and we often do)
- Be in the moment, and be yourself
- Plan the environment carefully, and set up “irresistible invitations” to move and play, and then stand back and observe, responding sensitively to requests to help, or to questions children ask. The answers may be in actions as well as words. Don’t jump in too soon. Take your time.
- Set the stage, but don’t act all the parts yourself
- Let children find things out for themselves through trial and error
- Mistakes are wonderful teachers, so allow children to experiment and explore
- Encourage child to child interactions (though it is early days for toddlers)
- Remove solitary play activities like bikes and cars, electronic equipment, TV (speak to families about this). Add in open-ended resources.
- Be a “wildlife” researcher; look for subtle clues, be very quiet in your actions and utterances, be still, be a “tracker” and you will find out so much more



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Jasmine Pasch runs the successful “Wiggly Jigglers at Rich Mix Cultural Foundation and facilitates training and workshops in settings across London. She advises on setting up spaces and planning the environment for movement and play opportunities, with clear links to the EYFS and the three prime areas. This can be particularly helpful for those involved in the two-year-old offer.