

# Creative ways to get kids moving and laughing

## BIG MUSCLE WORK ACTIVITIES

### Push/Pull

- **"Taxi"** - One child pushes/pulls another child in a laundry basket. Pick up puzzle pieces on the opposite side of the room with each trip and assemble a puzzle.
- **Push-o-war** with a big pillow; or, standing back to back or face each other with palms touching. One person pushes while the other resists, then reverse roles. *This is a great parent-child activity to help an anxious child feel powerful.* Stand as the "immovable object" or big buffoon "giant" between a child and their destination, and resist just enough to make it fun and exerting. Then flop powerfully to the couch or the floor with dramatic wails of defeat. Switch roles and dramatically exaggerate your effort but make sure the child is victorious in stopping you. Goal: physical activity and giggles.
- **Tug-o-war** with ropes, sheets, bike tire inner tubes, knit fabric tunnel.
- **Play wrestle** - Keep your hands on the child in one spot and push in a sustained way rather than moving hands around quickly, to avoid over-stimulating. Slow, rhythmical movement is best. Make sure all kids are clear on rules: No fighting behaviors or tickling. Have a designated, safe area (i.e. sleeping bag over carpet). Both must say "start" to begin, anyone can say "stop" and end the game. Ask kids for suggestions of other rules. If a child tends to escalate during this activity, be their other partner and use slow motion action, lots of rolling over together, heavy pressure, intermittent breaks.
- **Push-ups** or wall pushes especially before writing on school assignments, etc.
- **"Trampoline ride"** - Several children can pull a sheet tight to give their favorite stuffed animals a ride, or launch balls at a target.

### Jump

- **Pillowcase races**
- **Jump up stairs** with feet together (not alternating) for a big "core workout"; keep track of how many stairs a child can do without stopping each day.
- **Trampoline**, mini-tramp, or jump on an old mattress (use as a great activity for school memorizing such as spelling words or math facts).
- **Pogo stick** or "bungee jumper" (available online)
- Make a **hopscotch** pattern with painters tape (or even chalk on carpet and then vacuum up.)
- Jump off a step or steps, chair, couch or bench to land in a **pile of pillows**, bean bag chairs, sleeping bags.
- A **crash pad** is a great stress reliever! Use it for repetitive climbing and jumping or play wrestling, etc. To make one, take a comforter cover/duvet and stuff it with odds and ends of old pillows, blankets or sleeping bags. Or, sew extra sheet(s) together with only enough opening to stuff things into.

## Core work/general big muscle

- **"Toboggan"** - Children put feet in a sleeping bag (or sit on top) and sit-bounce their way down the stairs in it. (Can be very powerful calming/organizing input.) Also can belly slide down and army crawl back up the stairs.
- **Piggy back** rides, rolling, somersaults.
- **Wheelbarrow walk** - Lift child's feet, let him walk on his hands (the "wheelbarrow"). Set up a short path around objects. Challenge: go up/down stairs.
- **Animal walks** - Crab walk, bear walk, frog, snakes, bunny hops, elephant walk, duck waddle, horse gallops. Add an extra challenge: walk across pillows as an animal, go up/down a hill.
- **Belly crawl** across the carpet. Coordinating both arms and legs in reciprocal push/pull is great coordination and core work activity in this activity.
- **Strength exercises** - sit ups, lifting weights, push-ups, etc. Record child's progress on paper or video.
- **Climb stairs** - Give child clues to find objects on another level of the house and bring each one back to you by going up and down stairs. (Great game when away from home and don't have sensory motor equipment.) Climb ladders, rock climbing walls, tree trunks, etc.
- **Crawl** under a mattress, crash pad (see above) or pile of pillows with a blanket on top to find hidden toys, or stay under there while putting together a puzzle or reading a book.
- **Blow cotton balls** (herd the "sheep") across the floor into a 3 sided box lid (a "barn"), or tape square on the floor ("sheep pen"). You can have kids do this with/without a straw. It gives deep respiration and intense core work, which are both calming.
- **Stress relief squeezes** - Squish, squeeze, pinch, pull, or twist putty, squish balls, or balloons filled with flour, sand, rice, beans, etc.

## MOVEMENT THROUGH SPACE/BALANCE ACTIVITIES

- **Movement games** - Simon Says, Follow the Leader, Twister.
- **Blanket rides** on smooth/wood floors
- **Blanket swing** - Two adults each take the end of a blanket and swing a child laying inside, eventually dropping the child onto a bed for a soft landing. (This is rhythmical, calming muscle work for parents, too!)
- **"Dancin' on Dad"** - for lighter children. Put on fun music. Child walks or "dances" on top of a parent laying down between two cushions. Parents can add additional movement challenges for older kids.
- **Volleyball with a balloon or beach ball** over a rope across the living room.
- **Dance party** to kids' favorite music. Strobe light if you can one or flick the lights for them.
- **Obstacle courses** - planning movement, coordination, strength, spatial concepts
  - Big boxes are great for climbing into and out of, or open the ends to use as tunnels.
  - Stack up pillows with a blanket overtop to make a "hill" to climb over.
  - Use a small table as a bridge to go under.
  - Crawl around, through, or over a chair.

- Hula hoops or tires – crawl through and step into and out of.
- **“Hot Lava” or “Rushing River”** is a form of obstacle course where a child tries to get around the room without stepping on the floor. Carpet squares or washcloths are safe “islands” in “hot lava” (carpeted floor) or stepping stones in the river. Can use a long, narrow folded sheet or a 2 x 4 board for a bridge (balance beam); step stool, bench, etc.
- **Hop balls** (inflated ball with handle) Set up a relay course with flat objects/boards for kids to jump over.

## CALMING TOUCH/PRESSURE ACTIVITIES

- **“Burrito”**- Roll a child up in a blanket, sleeping bag, or soft rug. Pretend to add extra “ingredients” while providing extra squish pressure. Lift end to unroll, adjust speed as needed.
- **“Peanut butter sandwich”** - Child crawls between a box spring and mattress. Can add squish.
- **“Hotdog in a bun”** - Child lays face down between two pillows – above and below their trunk. Use slow, rhythmical moderate pressure on the top pillow. Model breathing out with downward pressure, breathing in while lifting pressure. Watch response carefully.
- **“Mummy wrap”** - Wrap trunk or body parts in ace bandages.
- Make a **large pillow pile** for a child to snuggle into, roll and climb over or fall onto. Reserve a corner of room for a pillow pile; can add flannel sleeping bags. Hide objects under pillows or a blanket and have the child crawl under to find objects or pile pillows on your child and give added pressure if they request it.
- **Make tents** out of blankets, add pillows and bedspreads
- Roll an **exercise/Pilates ball** or beach ball over your child's back and lean on it with moderately firm pressure.
- **“Swimming”** - Child does belly crawl across a carpeted floor as if swimming, and then parent “dries” child off with firm towel rub after gets across the “lake.” Then the child flips over onto their back and pushes across the “lake” with their feet to do a “backstroke”.
- **Crawling** through cloth tubing gives both touch and deep pressure sensations to the body. (You can sew regular knit fabric or knit sheet together on the long edge.)
- **Draw** on the child's back, arms, hands slowly and firmly and have the child guess what it is. If they are ticklish, use the broader part of your hand, not fingertips.
- Provide **touch throughout the day** through deep pressure “bear hugs,” massage, shoulder/backrubs, etc.
- **Hand & body paint** - Mix tempera paint with liquid starch, add a little liquid detergent to prevent staining (purple & black stain the most). Great in the tub, use hands and feet to paint. Face paints wash off easier if you apply lotion to the skin first.
- **Finger paint with food** - puddings, whip cream, ketchup, mustard, flour and water paste, or whatever!
- **Fidgets** - Fast food meal toys, squeeze balls, rubber band strings, pipe cleaners, beads on a lace or string, string of paper clips, etc.

## MUSIC/RHYTHM ACTIVITIES

Make activities the “just right challenge” for kids to keep the beat, give minimal assistance as needed.

- **Marching** and clapping, patting games to music
- **Music and movement activities**
  - <https://www.youtube.com/user/CosmicKidsYoga>
  - <https://www.gonoodle.com/for-families/>
  - [Greg and Steve](#) albums such as Kids in Motion, Kids in Action
- **CalmConnect** - Very soothing music and coordination activities. A good school break or later evening activity to prepare for bed. The difficulty level varies greatly to be appropriate for almost any age child. <https://prio-health.com/home/>
- **Household “instruments”** - Plastic buckets/pots for drums, wooden spoons for drum sticks, small jars with beans for shakers, put on music and encourage or model keeping the beat
- **Music in background** - classical such as Mozart is often best.
- **Jump rope** - Simple back and forth jump rope rhymes, regular overhead jump roping - forward and backward.

## COORDINATION ACTIVITIES

- **Finger painting** on large roll paper or designate a wall that you know you can repaint. Work on a mural, or make sections and each child gets a designated section for their wall art.
- **Bean bags** at targets - squeeze and throw (Can fill old sock with beans and knot the end.)
- Make **paper airplanes** and aim at targets.
- **Early cutting activities** – cut a Play-doh “snake” into chunks, cut short sections off of long folded strips of paper to make pieces for simple mosaic-type projects, cut straws to make jewelry “beads” to thread with string
- **Play-doh** - Child can help you make it from online recipes. Use rolling pin, silverware, dishes, kindergarten scissors, garlic press, cookie cutters; stamp it with jewelry or small toys.
- Use pincher **clothespins** to build objects or projects.
- **Stringing beads** or macaroni, can start with pipe cleaners then progress to shoe laces.
- **Folding** - napkins, laundry, paper airplanes, origami. Weaving paper strips.
- **Fine motor toys**
  - Pick-up sticks, Jenga, dominoes
  - Marbles
  - Tinker toys, Lego's, Bionacles, Lincoln logs. Make an item, have the child copy it.
- **Help in the kitchen** – measure, stir, flip, etc. Drop an egg on its side onto a plate or cake pan from about 10" and it will usually crack nicely in half. Then just pick out the shells and pour it into the bowl or pan. *Kids LOVE this activity!* Make sure each child gets a turn, so plan on omelettes for breakfast. ;-)