

Body awareness for motor skill development

What is body awareness and why is it important?

- Body awareness relates to how conscious and connected we are to our own body.
- Body awareness involves being aware of all our body parts, how our bodies are moving, and where we are located in space.
- Our muscles and joints send messages to our brains about our body and how it moves.
- Body awareness helps us to understand how to relate to objects and people at home, at school and outdoors. For example, accurate body awareness tells us how far to reach for objects, how close to stand next to a person, or how to walk without watching our feet.
- Sometimes, if people have difficulties with body awareness, they may appear clumsy, uncoordinated or have delays in motor skill development.



- Body awareness involves the proprioceptive system, which tells us where our muscles are moving and how, as well as the vestibular system, which is made of organs in the inner ear that are in charge of spatial orientation. The vestibular system allows us to keep our balance, posture, and head stability. If we feel dizzy, chances are our vestibular system is affected.
- When our proprioceptive and vestibular systems aren't processing information from our environment accurately, it can be stressful.
- Proprioception is involved with everything we do. We have receptors in our joints, muscles, and ligaments that tell us how we are moving, and where we are in relation to things and people around us. The proprioceptive sense sends information about our body's position to the brain.
- This awareness allows us to walk around objects in our path, move a spoon to our mouth without looking at it, and to stand far enough away from others while waiting in a line. It helps us to write without pressing too hard or too lightly on our pencil, and brush our hair with just the right amount of pressure. Proprioception is essential for everything we do!



Difficulties with body awareness

- Sometimes, the proprioceptive system does not do its job as well as it could. When the proprioceptive system isn't functioning properly, body awareness and motor planning can be a problem.
- When we need to pay attention to where our body is in space at all times, because it doesn't come naturally, we cannot attend to other important information like what is happening in our world around us. We can struggle to automatically adjust to environmental changes. We might need to compensate by looking closely as we adjust our body.
- Planning motor actions can be a struggle and result in us appearing fidgety, unsure, overwhelmed, clumsy, awkward, uncoordinated, lazy, fearful, or even scared in certain situations.



- Children who have difficulties with body awareness often:
 - Bump into others or objects
 - Chew on objects
 - Enjoy loud noises (or prefer quiet)
 - Dislike (or prefer) tight clothing
 - Avoid physical activity
 - Have difficulty walking on stairs



How can I help my child develop body awareness?

- Start out by helping your child identify body parts on themselves and others.
 - Move onto simple instructions such as "kick your leg", "wave your hand" or "shake your head".
 - Then progress to motor instructions such as "touch your elbow" and later to more challenging instructions such as "touch your right knee".
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- You can increase the challenge by practicing touching different body parts to different body parts, for example "touch your elbow to your knee" or "touch your shoulder with your nose".
 - The challenge can be increased again, for example "touch your left hand to your right ear", "put your right elbow on your left thumb", or "touch your left foot to your right knee".



Activities and games to increase body awareness

- Simon Says - especially when instructions focus on specific body parts (eg. Simon says touch your nose)
- Playing Follow the Leader, Twister, hopscotch, or clapping games
- Hula-hooping, swinging, walking backwards, Tug of War, climbing
- Jumping on a trampoline, pogo stick, or with a skipping rope
- Asking a child to draw a picture of themselves or someone else and naming the body parts
- Obstacle courses that require the child to go over, under, around, and in between objects
- Shadowing or mirroring games - asking your child to be your shadow, or mirror your movements
- Heavy work activities, like pushing, pulling or carrying heavy objects, or encouraging your child to help with heavy chores around the house and garden



- Playing games that involve identifying body parts on themselves or others. For example:
 - Point to a body part on yourself and ask the child to point to the same body part on themselves
 - Point to a body part on yourself and ask the child to point to the same body part on someone else (or a doll or teddy). This activity can be reversed, where you point to a body part of the teddy and ask the child to point to the same body part on themselves
 - Play Guess the Body Part - give the child clues about a body part, like "this body part is next to the hand", "you wear a watch on this body part" and ask the child to guess what it is
- Talking about body parts while bathing and dressing your child
- Dancing, interactive or movement songs like Hokey Pokey, Heads, Shoulders, Knees and Toes, or other body part songs

- Bilateral coordination activities, like jumping jacks, crawling, moving like animals, dancing or karate
- Balance exercises, walking in a straight line, standing on one foot, balancing a beanbag on head or shoulder, heel-toe walking, balance beams, or musical statues
- Children's yoga, such as Cosmic Kids Yoga on YouTube - <https://www.youtube.com/user/cosmickidsyoga>
- Climbing activities, like monkey bars, ladders, climbing ropes, and rock walls, and climbing trees and rocks
- Ball play, particularly including instructions that focus on using body parts, such as "roll the ball with your finger tips", or "kick the ball lightly with your foot"
- Bubble popping games, balloon games like "keepy uppy".

