

Ten Minutes a Day

A simple daily set you and your child do together. No equipment. Start as early as you like.

You cannot learn to ride a bike by reading about it. A brain is not filled — it is built, by doing things.

Movement with another person builds balance, coordination, attention and self-control at the same time, and it is good for the body while it does it.

Babies

birth to walking

• Face to face

Copy their sounds and expressions. Wait. Let them go again.

• Tummy time

Get down on the floor at their level, not above them.

• Just out of reach

Hold a toy slightly too far away and let them work for it.

• Gentle rolls

Roll them side to side, and bicycle their legs.

• Cross over

Touch one hand gently to the opposite foot, then swap.

• Follow me

Move your face slowly and let their eyes track it.

Toddlers

walking to three

• Clap it back

You clap twice. They clap twice. Build to four.

• Walk the line

A strip of tape on the floor, holding your hand.

• Carry something heavy

The shopping, a full jug, a stack of books.

• Animal walks

Bear on hands and feet. Crab facing up. Frog jumps.

• Roll and catch

Sit facing each other and roll a ball back and forth.

• Dance and freeze

Music on, dance. Music off, freeze.

Three to five

• Cross crawl

March on the spot, touch each knee with the opposite hand. Twenty.

• Flamingo

Stand on one leg and count. Then the other. Then eyes closed.

• Balloon keep-up

Do not let it touch the floor.

• Clap it back, longer

Four claps, then five, then with a pause in the middle.

• Mirror me

Face each other. You move slowly, they copy. Then swap.

• Wheelbarrow

You hold their ankles, they walk on their hands.

Five to eight

• Cross crawl, harder

Eyes closed. Or counting backward from twenty out loud.

• Heel to toe, backwards

Along the tape line, then carrying a cup of water.

• Pat and rub

Pat your head, rub your tummy. Then swap. Almost nobody gets it.

• Lazy eights

Draw a big sideways eight in the air. Eyes follow, head still.

• Partner stand-up

Sit back to back, link arms, stand up together.

• Jump rope or clapping games

Any of the traditional ones. Timing and rhythm.

THREE THINGS THAT MATTER MORE THAN WHICH ONES YOU PICK

Do it with them, not to them.

Badly, ideally — a child who watches you fail at pat-and-rub and laugh learns something no encouragement conveys.

Make it harder as they get better.

Aim for something they manage four times in five and have to work for. A game they always win has stopped building anything.

Say the hard part is the point.

When they wobble: "that is the part where it is working." Then stop while they still want more.