

## Developing Motor Planning Abilities

Motor planning is the ability of the brain to plan, organise and carry out a sequence of unfamiliar movements. Example: learning to kick a ball.

Motor planning is the first step in learning new skills.

Good motor planning is reliant on accurate information from our senses, (touch, taste, sight, hearing and smell), including our awareness of what position our body parts are in.

All our senses are important for providing us with the information to plan, organise and sequence a movement or action. When the senses are not providing the right information there will be difficulty with motor planning.

A child with motor planning dysfunction may seem clumsy, accident prone and messy. They may experience a prolonged period of struggle in attempting to master a new skill and therefore they will establish ways to avoid any unfamiliar or difficult new movements:

- A bright child may be able to compensate for their lack of accurate sensory information by figuring out the demands of a task cognitively but may spend undue mental energy in doing so.
- A child of average intelligence may spend their time minding another child's business, and may be verbally manipulative in order to avoid performing new movements. This child may imitate the actions of another child rather than try to imitate that activity themselves.
- Another child may even experience difficulty imitating the actions of others, and find it difficult to follow verbal instructions.

Motor planning difficulties are challenged each time a child is presented with a variation in familiar movements or with a new assignment. When learning to write or cut with scissors for example, a child uses a variety of senses to plan and sequence each stroke or cut in order to successfully complete the task. A child with a motor planning problem may have significant difficulty finishing their work on time or not have an idea how to start the strategy for finishing the task. Another child may rush through the task. This child typically turns in messy, haphazard work which in turn can affect the child's self-esteem.

### Strategies for helping a child with Motor Planning Difficulties

1. Help the child identify steps needed to begin and accomplish the task. Have the child repeat directions and, if possible, write down the steps. Demonstrate verbally as well as visually.
2. Ask the child questions e.g. "What are you going to do next?"
3. Encourage the child to verbalise what they are doing while carrying out the activities.
4. Break down tasks into small parts so that the child can feel instant success in completing each part of the task.
5. Make a note of how long the child can focus on a task, and make sure that no new task takes longer to complete.
6. Set up a system for checking off steps as they are accomplished. You could use pictures, photos, written lists or Dictaphone reminders for each stage.
7. Help the child physically move through the action, or use your hand over theirs to help them feel the movement.
8. Minimise visual distractions. Check for clutter in the immediate environment.
9. Try art projects that require assembling parts to create an object. Challenge the child's ability to develop strategies for organising parts together to make a whole.
10. Mark the boundaries of the game. For example, rope, yarn, marking tape or chalks can be used to mark a game circle or start and finish lines.
11. Encourage the child to imitate different gross and fine body postures, e.g. movements created

by the adult.

12. For younger children ask the child to pretend the movements of different animals, e.g., jump like a frog, swim like a fish, wriggle like a worm.
13. For younger children play “Simon Says” game to develop the child’s ability to transfer verbal commands into movement.
14. Create different obstacle courses to challenge the child’s motor planning ability.
15. Rehearse what the child has learned on a regular basis.

## Contact

### Children’s Therapy Services

Telephone number: 0300 019 2936

For further general health-related information, please ask the relevant department for an information prescription or contact:

The Health Information Centre  
Poole Hospital NHS Foundation Trust  
Longfleet Road  
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BH15 2JB  
Telephone: 0300 019 8003

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**We can supply this information in other formats, in larger print or have it translated for you. Please call the Patient Experience Team on 0300 019 8499 or email [patientexperienceteam@uhd.nhs.uk](mailto:patientexperienceteam@uhd.nhs.uk) for advice.**

**If you wish to make any comments or to ask about any research evidence used to write this leaflet, please contact the Patient Experience Team on 0300 019 8499, write to the Patient Experience Team (address above) or email [patientexperienceteam@uhd.nhs.uk](mailto:patientexperienceteam@uhd.nhs.uk)**

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