

Functional Motor Skill Benchmarks Intervention Strategies for Classroom Staff

Things to consider before beginning:

- Give clear instructions for a task, demonstrate proper body position and form to complete the task, and physically guide the child through the movement, if necessary.
- As a child is learning motor skills, it is important that she receive positive feedback, so she feels successful and is motivated to try the skills again. Praise specific parts of the skill she is learning, even if the outcome of the movement was not as expected. For example, if a child is learning to catch a ball, and he missed the ball, he may feel unsuccessful. Praising the child by saying, “I liked how you held your arms ready,” or “You did a nice job watching the ball,” will help him feel good about what he did right and not feel so bad about missing the ball.
- Children must be allowed to practice these tasks frequently and have a safe environment to play for best motor learning.

1. Climbs stairs with a rail (step over step)

- Hold child’s hand and practice stepping up and down from a short box or curb
- Hold child’s hand while he holds railing in opposite hand to walk up/down steps
- Practice steps on playground equipment, giving close supervision/assistance at first, and backing off as the child gains confidence
- Place a sturdy box or step next to a counter or shelf so the child must step up/down to get a toy, drink, wash hands, etc.
- Place footprint cutouts in the step over step pattern and have the child match their steps to these
- Let the child step down the last 2-3 steps independently if a full flight is too intimidating

2. Jumps forward with two feet landing and taking off

- Demonstrate proper form: legs bent at hips and knees, arms backward, trunk leaning forward as you begin the movement. Arms swing forward as legs and trunk straighten during push-off. Legs and trunk bend again, arms swing forward during landing.
- Hold child’s two hands and give a gentle pull forward as she jumps if she has difficulty moving forward
- Give verbal cues, “two feet,” “bend your knees,” or “swing your arms forward”
- Place a rope or hoop on the ground. Child stands with feet near the edge and jumps over the object
- Jump on/off shapes on the floor, or follow a path of shapes
- Pretend to be a frog and jump from a crouched position, with hands touching floor when taking off and landing
- Working on pushing up onto tiptoes will strengthen muscles in the ankles and feet needed for effective push-off during jumping

3. Jumps down from a height of 18 inches with two feet landing and taking off
 - Demonstrate proper form: legs bent at hips and knees, arms backward, trunk leaning forward as you begin the movement. Arms swing forward as legs and trunk straighten during push-off. Legs and trunk bend again, arms swing forward during landing.
 - Practice jumping down from low heights, starting with 4-6 inches and gradually working on higher steps. Use boxes, boards, stacked mats, or any stable surface to jump from.
 - Place soft mats to provide a safe landing
 - Begin by holding child's two hands, then one hand, then no hands held as the child gains confidence with each height.
 - Give verbal cue, "two feet" to encourage using both feet to push off and land
 - Foot print cut-outs can give a visual cue on the landing surface to encourage 2-foot jumps

4. Stands on one leg for 3-5 seconds
 - Practice standing with both feet together to give a narrow base of support. Footprint cut-outs may be used to give visual cue for foot placement
 - Practice standing with one foot in front of the other, heel touching toes
 - Practice stepping over hurdles to work on shifting weight to one leg. Alternate the lead foot to work both legs
 - Allow child to hold your hands or a wall/table initially, decrease support as child gains confidence
 - Count seconds out loud to provide motivation
 - Kicking a ball from a stationary starting point works on single-leg support while the other leg is moving
 - When taking shoes off or tying shoes, work on single leg support by standing and raising one leg instead of sitting (also try this with socks, pants, snowpants, boots)
 - Encourage child to keep hips level horizontally – do not drop or hike the hip of the leg that is bent

5. Walks on a four-inch wide balance beam without handheld assistance
 - Practice walking between two lines on the floor (about 6" apart) – try walking sideways, backward. Narrow the width as confidence builds
 - Use one wide line (about 4") on the floor, practice walking along the line without stepping off
 - Place a 6" wide board on the floor, practice walking along the board. Draw or tape footprints along the board if a visual cue is needed
 - Sidewalk curbs, raised beams and painted lines are great for practicing outside
 - Provide hand-held support initially and decrease support as confidence builds
 - Practice walking sideways to each side, backwards and turning around as balance improves
 - Kids like to pretend they are crossing a bridge from one place to another

6. Steps over a three-inch high obstacle
 - Use strategies from #4 (standing on one leg) to help child gain stability in single-limb stance
 - Demonstrate correct form: bend leg at the hip and knee to bring foot over the hurdle; do not swing leg around hurdle
 - Use toys, blocks, bean bags, balance beam, raised rope, curbs, hoops to practice
 - Use small hurdles as part of an obstacle course children can go through
7. Pedals and steers a tricycle around obstacles
 - Try strapping feet to pedals with elastic, velcro straps, etc. if child has difficulty keeping feet on pedals. It will also be easier if child wears shoes with good traction on the bottom so they won't slide on pedals as easily
 - Give the child a gentle push from behind or start on a slight downhill slope to get momentum going
 - Push gently on the thigh of the leg that should push down on the pedal to give the child a sense of pushing
 - Place a hula hoop or rope around the handle bars and pull gently from the front
 - Set up an obstacle course using cones, boxes, beanbags, etc to practice turning and work on steering and spatial awareness
8. Jumps on one foot (2-3 hops)
 - Child should be able to jump using both feet and maintain balance on one foot briefly before progressing to one-foot jumping
 - Demonstrate the position of the body (one leg straight, the other leg bent at the knee) and the movement (stance leg bends slightly, straightens during push-off and bends again during landing)
 - Give hand-held support to the child as they begin learning this task, gradually decrease support as confidence grows
 - Count out loud the number of hops to provide motivation
 - Use strategies from two-foot jumping tasks (# 2 and 3)
9. Stops and changes direction when running without falling
 - Practice running in an open, uncluttered, flat area initially. As balance and control improve, add some obstacles or have child run on uneven surfaces, such as grass, sand, etc.
 - Race the child to a particular spot or to get a ball. When the stopping point is not near a wall, fence or other stable object, it encourages the child to stop himself by controlling his momentum, rather than stopping by running into the wall, etc.
 - Play tag or other chase games that encourage running in various directions
 - "Red Light, Green Light," and base-running games work on stopping with control
 - Relay games work on stopping and changing direction – have a child run to get a beanbag, then run back and give it to a peer or drop into a bucket

10. Walks backward

- Give toys to pull backward, such as wagons, carts, or other pull toys
- Hold a hoop and give the other side to the child. Play a game in which you pull the child toward you while walking backward, then ask the child to pull you as they walk backward to their starting point
- Children can play “Tug of War” with a rope or hoop
- Foot print cut-outs or lines on the floor give visual cues for foot placement
- Use games or music that require changing direction: walk forward around the circle, then sideways, then backward

11. Gallops

- Demonstrate proper form: lead foot moves forward and is followed by rear foot moving forward to meet the lead foot.
- Guide the child through the movement, if necessary, showing them how to position their feet
- Go through this movement slowly, and verbalize each step. Ask the child to imitate each step as you demonstrate
- Pretend to ride a horse, or pretend to be a horse in a pasture or racetrack
- Use music to encourage rhythm
- Alternate lead foot after several repetitions to work on coordination of both legs

12. Kicks a ball straight from a stationary position

- This task requires balance on one leg while the other leg is moving through the kicking motion
- From a standing position, lift one foot and swing leg back, then forward to contact stationary ball with the front, inside part of foot. The knee bends, then straightens as the foot contacts the ball. Arm opposite kicking leg swings back as leg moves back, then forward with the kicking leg
- Demonstrate the movement and body position as described above, and guide the child through the movement, if necessary
- Begin by using soft foam balls, rag balls, or balloons

13. Catches a gym ball with two hands

- Demonstrate body position of holding arms out in front of the body, arms apart in relation to size of the ball, palms facing inward, elbows bent slightly
- Help the child position their arms, if necessary
- Give a cue to look at the ball as it comes toward them
- Begin by using a soft foam ball, rag ball or balloon, and let the child feel this before throwing it to her to decrease fear
- Initially throw the ball slowly over short distances (2-3 feet) and gradually increase distance and speed of the throws as the child’s skill improves
- Brightly-colored balls will help improve visual tracking
- As children are learning this skill, many will trap the ball against their chest. This is fine to help them gain confidence with catching. Encourage children to hold their arms out in front of them and catch the ball there as the skill improves

14. Throws a small ball overhand at least five feet in the air.

- Demonstrate throwing movement: Bring arm up and back with the elbow bent, then bring the arm forward as the elbow straightens. Step toward the target as you throw.
- Guide the child through the movement, if needed
- Practice hammering against a horizontal surface to help teach the general arm movement
- Practice holding a ball in one hand, then dropping it to teach grasp and release
- Play throwing games with beanbags, balloons, sponges, whiffle balls, paper balls
- Use hoops, baskets, buckets, boxes, shapes taped to the wall, etc. for targets at various heights and distances
- If balance is an issue, child may begin by throwing from a seated position

15. Zips or buttons coat independently