

# MOVEMENT

This time Ms. Ellen focused on how we can aid babies and toddlers best by allowing them time and space to move their own bodies. Sometimes this means finding space for movement and sometimes it means remembering to wait for them to figure out how to reach, crawl, or stand all on their own.

It is fascinating to observe the development of movement and consider how much growth happens in this area beginning with infants and moving through the first and second year of life. Phenomenal changes take place as babies and toddlers gain strength, coordination, and fluidity in their movements.

We observe that the infant's movements are largely governed by reflexes. Babies are learning to suck and strengthen the muscles in their mouth as they feed. Their limbs can "startle" at sounds or when muscles relax. They are moving their head and eyes to follow a sound or object. Their movements at this point are largely unorganized. As babies' gain more strength in their neck, they are provided a new perspective from which to observe the world and others. They can begin to purposefully reach their arms and hands out toward an object to grasp it. They kick their legs over and over, feeling the bounce throughout their body.

We can observe that babies' motor development happens in a "top-down" fashion. An infant's mouth first gains strength through sucking, then her neck becomes strong and she can hold her own head up, then her trunk, which allows her to sit unassisted. Then we see legs working to kick, push up to knees to crawl, and eventually to stand and walk. We also notice that motor development occurs from the "inside-out". To imagine this, notice how a baby's arm first moves as a "startle" in an unconscious way. Then he is able to reach out toward objects, and subsequently use his hand to bat at an object. Finally, the fingers can grasp a desired toy with purpose, and fine motor skills develop rapidly.

All of this development happens as babies gain strength, which can only be acquired through movement. Therefore, it is very important that babies have safe space with ample room, like a blanket on the floor, to move and strengthen muscles. As she moves, a baby's brain is making important connections that spur her learning and understanding of the world. Her brain is learning about conscious movement and cause/effect. These first simple movements are quite literally organizing and informing her brain. You will notice that babies and toddlers tend to repeat recently acquired movement skills over and over as they excitedly realize they are able to do something new (i.e. climb steps, or throw a ball). This repetition is an uncontrollable urge the child has to perfect a skill. Just the sensation of being able to do something new is so satisfying that the child wants to feel it over and over again. We must do our best to support and share in their joy!

We know that "tummy time" is a large focus of much writing on helping babies' develop strength. While it is true that some time could be beneficial, we want to listen to our baby's signs of frustration and discomfort, and respond promptly. As adults, we have many baby products designed to keep our children safe, and provide parents with time to accomplish other things; some of these include, car seat carriers, high chairs, bouncy seats, play pens, and exer-saucers. While many of these items can be necessary, it is important to safeguard time and space that is not "belted in" and held in one position for

a long period of time. We can unknowingly be stunting our baby's development through relying too heavily on these products.

We want to also be aware of the time and patience necessary in supporting our child's motor development. It will not be beneficial to our child if we are constantly correcting their efforts or simplifying every single task they endeavor to accomplish. There is a saying we can take to heart; "rescue can be robbery", meaning that if we rush in to assume our toddler needs assistance every time they are putting forth effort to accomplish something, we may be robbing them of the ability to acquire that skill. A child who is constantly corrected before exerting himself will also possibly come to believe he is not capable of trying new things. We need to be sensitive to when our child is actually frustrated and asking for our help, as opposed to when we could allow them a tiny amount of discomfort in accomplishing a goal.

Maria Montessori often wrote and spoke about the importance of freedom of movement as a building block of the intellect. She felt that the hand was an instrument of the brain. If a child were too overprotected and not allowed freedom to move and act upon his environment, she may not develop intellectually in the same way she could have if her space and freedom had been respected.

The Association Montessori International has developed a beautiful website that is designed for parents. They have included a wonderful section on Movement. We have the book on Movement on our lending shelf, if you would like to look at it as well. The link is below:

<http://aidtolife.org/movement/movement.htm>

I have also included these gorgeous videos because I think they are a perfect demonstration of all the work that infants feel compelled to do on their own.

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=D9Ko7U1pLlg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=D9Ko7U1pLlg)

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=14gWirURq6l](http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=14gWirURq6l).