

3 Body builders



A Balancing Flamingo

Has your child ever seen a flamingo or a picture of one? If not, tell your child about flamingos – a bright pink bird that loves to stand on one leg! Then pretend with your child to be a flamingo! Show your child how to pull one leg up and balance while standing on one foot. Then try the other foot. Talk to your child about balance. You can hold one of her hands at first to help her learn to balance. Then draw a line on the ground with chalk, or use masking tape to put a line down on the floor. Show your child how to walk on the line, putting one foot in front of the other. See how far she can walk without stepping to one side of the line.

Your child is using her muscles to learn balance.



Playing Catch

Practice playing catch with your child. You can buy a soft ball from the store (bigger is better), or simply use a soft toy like a stuffed animal. Stand close to your child at first, and gently throw the ball into your child's arms. If he is having trouble catching the ball, show him how to put his hands out, stand very close, and gently drop the ball into his hands so that he can see how it feels to catch. Let him practice throwing the ball to you. Little by little, move back so that he can practice throwing and catching the ball from farther apart. If a ball is too heavy, you can play this game with a balloon. Because the balloon is lighter and takes longer to fall, it will be easier for your child to catch. (Be careful not to let your child put the balloon, or pieces of a popped balloon in his mouth. It can choke him.)

Playing catch will help your child's muscles grow strong and build his eye-hand coordination.



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Score!

Find a ball that is big enough for your child to kick. Use an old box that is big enough for the ball to fit in, and set it up as a "goal." You could also use an empty waste basket or laundry hamper, as long as it will stay in place so that your child can kick the ball into it. Set the goal up several feet away from your child, and let her practice kicking the ball, trying to get it into the box and scoring a goal. If she has trouble kicking the ball into the goal box, you can move it closer. Or, you can be the helper, moving the goal around to try and catch the ball. You can also hold the box and have her throw the ball into it, to score a basket. The most important thing is not whether she makes the goal or basket, but that she is practicing throwing and kicking.

Your three year old is building her leg and arm muscles and her coordination.



Freeze Dance

Play music or sing and clap. Have your child dance to the music, and after a few seconds, stop the music. Tell your child that when the music stops, he should “freeze.” That means if he is in the middle of a dance move – with his arms in the air, or one foot off the ground – he has to hold that position until the music starts again. After a few seconds, start the music again or start singing and have your child start dancing again. Trade places with your child and let him start and stop the music while you dance. He will have fun trying to “catch” you while you are in the middle of a dance move.

Your child is learning to stop and start, to balance, and also to listen.



Somersaults

Help your child learn to do a somersault. First, find a soft place to roll on – a soft floor or grassy area. Show her what a somersault looks like. When it is her turn, help her squat down and tuck her head under and pull her knees into her chest. Support her body as she rolls over, and give her lots of praise each time she tries to do a somersault. It will probably take many tries to get all the way over, and she may not roll in a straight line. That's okay, just help her practice rolling and tucking her head and knees in, and have fun together rolling on the ground.

Your child is building her muscles, coordination and balance.



Cereal Necklaces

Two or more children might enjoy this activity together. You will need breakfast cereal with holes in it big enough to fit on a string. You will also need pieces of string long enough to fit over each child's head when the ends are tied together. You can use long shoe strings, or pieces of string or yarn. Wrap a piece of tape around the end to make the yarn or string easier for the children to use. Give them a bowl of the cereal and let them put the cereal on the string to make necklaces they can eat! (Be careful to throw or put away the string when you are done with this project so they cannot get it tangled around their necks and choke.) You could also use penne pasta and tint some of the pasta with food coloring. Then your child can make up a pattern: red, yellow, red, yellow.

Your child is using the small muscles in her hand, and building her eye-hand coordination.





Visit the Park

Take your child to a park that has swings and slides to play on. Help her practice climbing up the stairs and sliding down the slides. She can also start to learn how to pump her legs by herself on the swing. Push your child on the swing for a while and talk about how she is going forward and back, forward and back. Then show her how to lean back and thrust her feet forward as the swing moves forward, and how to lean her body forward and bend her knees back as the swing moves backward. With some practice and lots of encouragement, she will learn how to pump and keep herself swinging.

A visit to the park lets your child use all the muscles of her body. Practice at climbing, sliding and swinging teaches her balance and coordination too.



Bubble Chase

You can purchase very inexpensive bubbles to blow with your child, or make your own by mixing one part dishwashing liquid with three parts water. Play a game of “pop the bubble” by standing or sitting facing your child and blowing bubbles for him. Don’t blow them in his face. Have him chase the bubbles and see how many he can pop before they touch the ground or pop on their own. Count out loud as he pops bubbles, encouraging him to run after them and “clap” to pop them. Have your child try blowing bubbles for you to catch and pop.

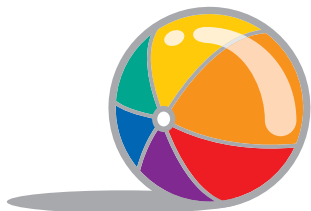
Chasing and catching or popping bubbles gets your child moving and builds his coordination by running and accurately catching the bubbles.



Art Time

When you have time to supervise this activity, give your child different types of paper, such as construction paper, tissue paper, and newspaper. Help him practice tearing the paper into pieces. On another day, show him how to use child's scissors to make cuts in different papers (this will take a lot of adult assistance). Show him how different paper is easier or harder to tear or cut. Once you have some pieces of paper torn or cut, show him how to put a small amount of glue on one piece of paper and glue it to another. Save a piece of this "art" to show to other members of the family.

Your child is learning to use his hands and fingers to do detailed tasks like cutting, tearing and gluing. When you show his "art" to others, you will build his confidence and help him think positively about his abilities.



Follow the Leader

Play a game of follow the leader to help your child use the big muscles in her body to skip, hop, jump, walk on tiptoes, march, walk on a line, balance on one foot, turn in a circle, wave your arms – anything you can think of to keep moving and have fun! Put some music on or sing and clap while you take turns being the leader. Older brothers and sisters or friends can also play along.

By copying your actions while moving around, your child is learning to follow directions and use her muscles at the same time. By being the leader, your child is learning to problem-solve, having to think up actions and then do them for you to follow.



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