

Core Strengthening Activities

Core Strength

- ❖ Refers to the strength of the muscles around the hips/pelvis and trunk (abdominals and the back extensor muscles).
- ❖ A strong core is required for the stability of the trunk with movement. A strong core allows your pelvis and trunk to remain stable when one leg is lifted or when reaching for an object, for example. Poor core strength can result in slouching when sitting, as well as difficulty with balance and various movement activities. Functionally, this can result in difficulty with various gross motor activities, including hopping on one foot, climbing up/down stairs, maintaining balance while stepping over objects or up/down a curb.

Strengthening Activities

- ❖ **Different Ways to Move** – these activities can be incorporated into races and obstacle courses (moving around/over/under obstacles). Try incorporating them into action songs, such as “Going on a Bear Hunt.”
 - **Animal Walks** (see handout) - specifically, bear walk and crab walk
 - **Commando Crawl** – with your stomach on the floor, use your arms and legs to move your body forward. Try crawling over piles of cushions or through a “tunnel” (under a chair or tunnel of couch cushions, etc)
 - **Wheelbarrow walk** – hold your child at the thighs or knees while he/she walks. Watch for a sagging back or excessive bending at the hips – this means the core muscles are tired. If your child does well and doesn’t show these signs of fatigue, you can begin to hold the legs at the shins, and then the ankles.
 - **Knee walking** – practice walking forward, backward or sideways on your knees. This activity helps to strengthen the muscles around the pelvis and hips, which are essential for good balance.
 - **Crawling** – practice crawling over piles of cushions and on other soft surfaces.
- ❖ **Exercise Ball Activities**
 - **Wheelbarrow Walk** – your child’s stomach should be on the ball while he/she walk out on his/her hands to get a toy/book etc. Encourage your child to walk back with the toy. Initially your child may require assistance with balance (support lightly at the hips). Encourage your child to walk out as far as having the knees supported by the ball. Watch for a sagging back and excessive bending at the hips – if this is observed, limit the distance your child walks out from the ball.
 - **Sit and Bounce** – bouncing on the balls requires the muscles of the core to engage each time your child lands on the ball. This activity may serve as a sensory regulation tool for some children.
 - **Sit ups** – have your child lay on his/her back on the ball and roll backward to pick items up from the floor (ie. Would be reaching backward, over his/her head), encourage your child to sit up with the item. To assist your child, you can begin to roll the ball back forward until he/she is able to sit up on his/her own.
 - **Sit on the Ball** - have your child sit on the ball and play catch, complete table activities (crafts, play dough, read a book), pick up items from the floor (such as bean bags to toss into a bucket;

encourage crossing the midline so that your child is picking up items on his/her left with the right hand and vice versa, as well as using the same hand)

❖ **Different Positions for Play**

- **High Kneel** (ie. Standing on knees) – this activity can be incorporated into games/crafts/etc at a low table or while playing catch.
- **Half Kneel** (ie. One knee down on the ground, the other knee up – this is typically how you would move to stand from the floor) – try maintaining this position while playing catch or playing at a low table. This position helps to strengthen muscles around the hips/pelvis to help with balance.
- **Lay on Stomach** (propped on elbows) – this can be used while reading a book or playing with toys on the floor. It helps to strengthen the muscles of the back and shoulders.
- **Superman** – Lie on your stomach and lift arms and legs (keeping elbows and knees as straight as possible). Try lying on a pillow or scooter board and lifting the arms and upper body to toss a stuffed animal back and forth (don't worry as much about the legs for this activity)
- **Bridging** – Lie on your back with knees bent so feet are flat on the floor. Push through your feet to lift your hips off the floor, creating a "bridge." Try driving cars or walking animals under or over the bridge to encourage your child to maintain this position for different lengths of time.

❖ **Recreational Activities**

- **Playing at the Playground**
 - Pumping on the swings
 - Climbing different ladders (unstable ladders, arced ladders, etc)
 - Walking over unstable surfaces (bridges, etc)
 - Running in the sand
 - Hanging from the monkey bars – try to lift knees up towards chest or try to swing back and forth.
 - Walking on balance beams or the wooden beams around the perimeter of the sand
- **Swimming**
 - Practice kicking while holding the edge of the pool or a flutter board
 - Running in the water
 - Balancing on one foot, hopping on one foot
 - Sitting on a flutter board or large foam mat and maintaining balance
 - Pushing balls under the water and letting them pop back up
 - Splashing water with a noodle or flutter board (push water forward/backward, as well as to the right and left – encourage bending of the trunk to increase the force)