

Crossing the midline

What is crossing the midline?

The midline is an imaginary line drawn down the middle of our bodies. Crossing the body midline is the ability to spontaneously move over to reach across the middle of the body with a body part, such as arms or legs. The ability to cross the midline develops with age; as children learn to co-ordinate the movement of their arms and legs during daily activities and games. Some children need extra support to learn to do this.

Why is it important to be able to cross the midline?

Crossing the body midline is an important skill needed for many everyday tasks such as writing, drawing, and painting, putting on clothing, putting on shoes and socks, and playing many sports. Later, a child may have difficulty learning to read, because they find it challenging tracking the words. If your child learns to cross the midline, they develop a preference for a dominant hand, and therefore practice building on those skills. The ability to cross the midline means both sides of the brain are communicating and the child can co-ordinate both the left and right sides of the brain together; required for learning and movement.

How will I know if my child has difficulty crossing the midline?

- Child may compensate by moving their body to the side when drawing, painting or doing a puzzle
- Child may transfer the pencil or crayon from one hand to the other, rather than cross the midline
- Child may use the left hand for things on the left side of the body, and the right for things on the right side
- Child may swap feet when trying to kick a ball
- Child may step to the side when standing at the easel painting rather than swap hands
- Child may have difficulty co-ordinating a variety of motor tasks, such as climbing, skipping and ball skills

What can I do to help a child who has difficulty crossing the midline?

Gross Motor Activities

- Swimming
- 'Simon Says' – with actions using arms and legs
- Hitting a suspended ball with a bat or hand – ensure your child doesn't turn their body to avoid crossing his/her arm in front of the body (e.g. a ball hanging from a tree in an old stocking)
- Streamers: Getting your child to make streamer or ribbon circles and patterns in front of their midline (use two hands together or one in each hand).
- Singing 'Wheels on the Bus' - use both arms to be the 'windscreen wipers' and reach across body to 'beep' the horn with one arm at a time.
- Swinging arms in a circle for each jump on a trampoline
- Rope Activities – such as jumping along a rope, one jump, then two jumps on each side
- Drawing large circles on a large easel or piece of paper, keeping the elbows as straight as possible
- Use large (adult size) paint brushes and/or rollers and let your child paint the sides of the house with water. Encourage using one hand at a time.
- Playing cars on a large path – draw a line on a large piece of paper or make a large path on the floor with blocks for your child to drive their toy cars. Put lots of turns in the path. Encourage your child to just use one hand to drive the car.
- With a group of friends, play circle games to music while sitting crossed legged on the floor, such as passing a balloon or ball, toy, etc.
- Position items or equipment in a way that your child has to cross the midline when reaching for them
- Encourage your child to sit straight rather than move or twist their body in the chair when drawing
- When handing your child something, position it so that your child has to reach across their body

Fine motor Activities

- Drawing – draw around each hand with the other hand
- Finger puppets – encourage your child to place finger puppets on one hand and remove them using the other hand
- Play sorting games: place objects to sort on the left side and containers to place them in on the right side: pompoms, marbles, coins, cars, small coloured counters, small coloured bears etc.
- Threading – Sewing on cardboard sheets with a shoelace
- Magnetic Fishing – encourage child to hold rod in one hand and pick up fish placed on the left side
- Encourage the child to continue with the chosen hand when drawing or painting, rather than swap hands

Where do I get help if there is no change after implementing the strategies recommended or if you are concerned?

Make an appointment with an Occupational Therapist – your family GP may be able to advise you or refer to the PSFO referral guide that your child's Educator should have.

Note: What is an Occupational Therapist?

An Occupational Therapist focuses on helping children develop skills which enable them to achieve the best of their ability in areas including independence in self-care, sensory processing, and the use of their hands to manipulate equipment effectively.

Reference: <http://www.childdevelopment.com.au/sound-awareness/130>