The importance of body awareness.

Body awareness is learned in early childhood and is an important precursor to learning. Knowing where your body is in space, right and left discrimination, and spatial relations are all components of body awareness and necessary for learning.

In the early school years (preschool & kindergarten) children are still learning about their bodies and where they are in space. They still depend on their sense of vision in order to complete many tasks. They also have to “think about” the movements that they go through throughout the day.

Poor body awareness can lead to difficulties in handwriting, pencil pressure, poor pencil grip later in school. This can also lead to difficulties with age appropriate gross motor activities in gym and on the playground.

Developing body awareness explains why young children seem to always be on the move—their bodies are trying to figure out how they are moving and where their bodies are in space.

Activities that focus on body awareness can help promote a child’s skills to ensure success with present and future academic skills.

Activities to promote body awareness.

- Set up obstacle courses with items in the room—talk about the movements and directions in which the children are moving (up, over, under, crawl, etc.)
- Play games such as hokey pokey, Simon says, follow the leader, etc.
- Provide various opportunities to make pictures of themselves.
- Use lots of tactile activities and talk about the body parts which are receiving the input—sand, water, lotion, sandpaper, a box filled with dry rice, beans, or pasta.
- Provide the child lots of opportunities for movement especially “heavy movement” activities such as carrying books, moving desks/chairs, jumping, marching, animal walks, etc.
- Teach the child about his right side initially. We use our right hands to shake hands and say the Pledge of Allegiance—therefore this is an important skill for the child to learn. If the child learns where his right side is, he will automatically learn that his other side is his left side. You can put stamps, a marker dot, or sticker on the child’s right hand. Follow this up with activities involving the right side of the body such as shaking hands. You can also use dab of a scent such as vanilla or perfume, lotion, glitter, etc.
- Let the children practice making letters, shapes, numbers, in play-dough or putty.
- Use color cues to outline boundaries of shapes, etc. for coloring, cutting or looking at. You can use a colored marker or fabric paint (allow time to dry & also good for extra tactile input).
- If the child still demonstrates difficulties with body awareness skills check with your occupational therapist for additional strategies to try.
- Use fine mesh window screen or sandpaper placed under paper for coloring activities for increased tactile input.
- Use verbal and visual reminders for right and left discrimination such as making an L with your fingers for left or your right is closest to the window.
- Use a mirror when possible for visual feedback when performing a motor task.
- Let the children practice making letters, shapes, numbers, in play-dough or putty.
- Provide gentle pressure through the child’s shoulders when trying a new fine motor task.
- Give your students lotion at circle time and have them rub it on a specified body part i.e. face, hands, etc.
- Target games, puzzles, blocks.
- Playground opportunities.

Adaptations for decreased body awareness.

- Use color cues to outline boundaries of shapes, etc. for coloring, cutting or looking at. You can use a colored marker or fabric paint (allow time to dry & also good for extra tactile input).
- If the child still demonstrates difficulties with body awareness skills check with your occupational therapist for additional strategies to try.
- Let the children practice making letters, shapes, numbers, in play-dough or putty.
- Provide gentle pressure through the child’s shoulders when trying a new fine motor task.
- Give your students lotion at circle time and have them rub it on a specified body part i.e. face, hands, etc.
- Target games, puzzles, blocks.
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