

Ten ordinary things you can do to improve co-ordination

For children with developmental co-ordination disorder (or dyspraxia) day to day activities can be physically challenging. The basis of addressing co-ordination issues is about getting both sides of the body working effectively together, strengthening the core muscle groups at the pelvis and shoulders, and improving balance and body awareness. There are many ordinary activities you can encourage your child to do on a day-to-day basis which will do just these things.

1. **Carry shopping:** carrying a reasonably heavy bag of shopping in each hand strengthens the muscles in the shoulder girdle and improves stamina and body awareness. Did you know that stronger shoulders and better body awareness lead to better handwriting?
2. **Push a full laundry basket:** this is the same idea as carrying the shopping bags. Anything which is a little hard to push will strengthen shoulders. Pushing from room to room needs planning and spatial awareness. Progress to a shopping trolley or even the lawnmower (under close supervision, of course).
3. **Trampoline:** this uses both sides of the body together and bouncing with both feet at the same time strengthens the leg, hip and stomach muscles. It's great for stamina, balance and sensory issues too!
4. **Crawl:** yes, crawling on all fours is quite complicated as it takes the co-ordinated movement of first the left arm and right leg, then the right arm and left leg. The more crawling the better for teaching the brain to use both sides of the body together. Progress to commando crawling (on belly) where the head must turn with each movement to stay close to the floor, or try to go as fast as possible. Did you know that when we master a crossover pattern of movement like this, our brain can figure out which side of our body is dominant and our skills using that side also improve?
5. **Play park:** revisit the play park, and swing, spin, climb, hang or jump as much as possible. Arms and legs are working together in almost every activity here.
6. **Swingball:** remember Swingball? Well, it's great for hand-eye co-ordination. Start with a larger racquet and progress to the bat. Stay slow and low at the start and work on the forehand side first to boost confidence.
7. **Target practice:** this can be anything from throwing beanbags into buckets, lobbing water filled sponges or balloons at dad (my personal favourite on a warm day), firing nerf guns, or knocking down skittles. It improves hand-eye co-ordination, spatial awareness, and teaches the force needed for certain movements. Encourage your child to take their time, focus and take aim. Start with bigger objects to throw and large containers to catch, and go down in size as skills improve.



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8. **Playdough:** give that old nursery favourite a dust off, even for older kids. Encourage rolling, kneading, pinching, pulling, using shape cutters or scissors, to make a variety of things. It strengthens the small muscles of the hands, and teaches how much force to use for more delicate tasks.
9. **Action rhymes:** probably better suited to younger children, songs like 'head, shoulders, knees and toes' teach body awareness, co-ordination, and improve memory, especially if you leave out a word for each new verse!
10. **Simon Says:** a bit like the action rhymes, following the movements of someone else takes concentration, perception, movement planning and body awareness. Start with your back to your child, so they can copy the movement more easily. When standing in front of them, they must mirror the movement which is harder. Progress by doing different things with the left and right sides of your body.

