



Control Skills for Babies

In the second half of the first year life, intentional movements become important vehicles for learning. Unlike infants, babies can intentionally move from one place to another. Crawling allows for exploration of the environment and the acquisition of new knowledge. Babies can learn more when they can control the movements of their bodies and body parts. Two major tasks of babyhood include gaining control of the entire body against gravity, as well as inspecting and manipulating small objects. Postural control needs to be practiced to enhance developing motor abilities. Although normal maturation will ensure that a baby is motivated to explore and manipulate, it becomes the caregiver's responsibility to encourage, nurture, and praise early learning, and not hinder it. *Pre-language intelligence is sensory-motor intelligence*. This reminds adults that babies are active learners and they acquire a vast amount of knowledge before they ever learn to speak. Babies learn the most by having their senses stimulated and their bodies challenged with manipulation options, spatial experiences, and a variety of obstacles.

Manipulation

The manipulation play area encourages practice of tasks for gaining control of muscles which work the arms, hands, and fingers. A major accomplishment of babyhood is intentional reaching, grasping, and releasing. This will ultimately lead to the mastery of daily living skills like self feeding, pouring liquids, and the intentional release of objects. Muscle control is first mastered in the arm, then the hand, and finally the fingers. This area allows babies to practice important tasks that lead to more refined movement patterns.

Suggested Equipment, Toys and Props:

Various sized plastic or fabric shapes

Small items (only for closely supervised practice of grasping)

Pounding toys

Plastic measuring cups

Small boxes

Mirror

Noise makers, rattles

Bath toys

Balls of various sizes and textures

Hinged objects

Sturdy books

Soft phone

Cubes

Stuffed animals

Spaces

Babies attempt control skills by first gaining control over their own bodies, then this control is extended to include objects. The development of the ability to control the body in relation to objects parallels the development of control of the body in space. Crawlers like big spaces for crawling through. A small plastic swim pool makes an inviting space to crawl into and the boundaries of the pool help to establish the child's play space. However, going inside any space may only be appealing if the space appears safe. Creating specific safe spaces for the baby provides refreshing challenges for controlled locomotion.

Suggested Equipment, Toys and Props:

Hoops	Boxes (open or closed)
Arches	Foam swim noodles
Barrels or tunnels	Traffic cones
Mats	Small plastic pools
Laundry baskets	

Obstacles

The obstacles area challenges the child's quest for postural control. As babies gain control of various muscle groups, they display the ability to make greater postural adjustments in order to maintain stability. Muscle control is first mastered in the head and neck, then the trunk, then the arms and legs. The obstacle area stresses stability and locomotion tasks. Obstacles which have more than one entry or exit will challenge curiosity. Obstacles which have options for going under, over, up, down, or through will challenge postural control, stability, and decision making. Crawling up a small wedge is much easier than crawling down and maintaining postural control against gravity.

Suggested Equipment, Toys and Props:

Small jungle gym	Tunnels
Steps	Milk crates
Ladder	Ramps and sliding board
Mats	Inner tubes
Wedge mats	Large stuffed animals
Inclines	

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