

EARLY YEARS GYMNASTICS

Early Years Gymnastics

Children in the early years are developing in so many ways, hence gymnastics at this age is all about exploring different physical skills, on the ground and on equipment.

Elements of Gymnastics

Early years gymnastics is a great way to support early years physical development as there are so many elements that can be used in a planned lesson or during child-directed play:

Use of Large Equipment	Children naturally spend most of their active time on their feet, hence it is important to provide them with opportunities to climb, take weight with their hands, turn upside down and use their core strength. This will contribute to full body strength, particularly upper body strength.
Pencil roll	Children to lie on the ground with their arms stretch out above their heads and toes pointed. Roll sideways. Start on a ramp/incline mat. Ensure there is enough space that children can roll a distance without bumping into anything or anyone.
Forward roll	Do the Mini Yo! Frog position Instruct children to tuck their chin in. The children may require help with this. If they struggle with the idea, give them a beanbag to hold between their chin and chest. Start on a ramp/incline mat (soft play / mats) Be a frog at the top Chin tucked in Roll forward by first placing their hands down and then roll onto their backs Keep practicing!

Balance on Beams	Development of dynamic Balance, which is maintaining control and balance while moving, e.g. walking on a balancing beam, riding a bicycle, balancing while throwing or catching a ball. Typically: 3-year-old children should be able to walk along a wide balance board. 4-year-old children should be able to walk part way along a narrow beam. 5-year-old children should be able to walk the length of a narrow beam.
Working in Pairs	Working in pairs is a skill that children in the early years need to develop. Some may find it very challenging to complete a simple task if they need to do it with others. Hence, take any opportunity to progress a skill or task by asking children to do them in pairs.
Combining Movements	Many movements are naturally combined and to support body awareness, it can help children to identify what they are doing and what parts of their bodies they are using to do so. Many combined movements will require a level of coordination, balance and body/spatial awareness. Once children are confident doing a single move, you could progress to doing two movements at the same time, e.g. jump with arms down, land with raised arms, etc.

Other Equipment

Hoops
 Beanbags
 Parachute or fabric
 Tunnels

Gymnastics Skills & Animal Gymnastics

Children will be using many early years skills during gymnastics activities, however some will be used more, such as the below skills.

Create engaging activities by moving like animals, for example:

Gymnastics Skills	Animal Gymnastics
Tip Toe	Tip Toe like a giraffe from one hoop to the next.
Climb	Climb the large equipment like monkeys.
Hop	Hop on one foot like a bunny rabbit.
Step	Step like a lion on the balancing bench.
Slither	Slither like a snake under the bench, large equipment, parachute, tunnel, etc.
Leap	Leap like a leopard from one rock to another to cross a river.
Jump	Jump off equipment and around the space like kangaroos.
Shuffle	Shuffle like a penguin round the hall.
Walk	Walk as a proud lion on the balancing beam.

Shapes

Some shapes may be new to the children and some may have already been explored through the Mini Yo! activities. See the shape flashcard download in the Shape section.

Ball Curl up into a ball like the Mini Yo! rock.

Table Backwards on hands and feet.

Bridge Mini Yo! bridge

L-Shape Legs straight out on the floor and hands up in the air

Pencil Stretch arms up above head and point toes

V-Shape Sit up straight with legs stretch out to the side in a V-shape

Tuck Sit or lie down and pull knees in tight to the body and tuck elbows in.

Boat Lie on back, lift arms and feet into a dish shape