

# ANIMAL FUN

Making the Connections:  
Motor Skills and Mental Health

# Looking to improve confidence and self-esteem in your class?

Helping kids to gain mastery over their **bodies** and their **emotions** is a great place to start.

Research tells us that children who have **poorly developed motor skills** also **perceive themselves** as being **less competent** and having **fewer play mates** than their peers.

These feelings can lead to an **increase in anxiety and depressive symptoms** in young children.

If you notice children:

- Being excluded from playground games.
- Reluctant to join in with others.
- Fearful of participating in physical activities such as climbing.

Or any of the following:

- Unusual running style - excessive head movement/awkward gait.
- Avoidance of craft activities involving cutting and pasting.
- Inability to control emotions with small issues.
- Reporting sudden headaches or tummy upsets immediately before a specific task when otherwise appearing to be well and happy.

**This may indicate a difficulty with motor development and could be worthwhile investigating further.**

# A simple game to improve balance and stability!

Improving **gross motor skills** has a huge impact on **fine motor skill** performance.

As you focus on gross motor movement, you'll start to see improvements in activities which require more precise movements, such as **writing and drawing** or even tying shoelaces.

Begin with some simple balance exercises, which develop core strength and large muscle strength and stability.

**Being balanced and stable, helps us to feel secure.**

You can use the **Pencil Pine Activity** to develop these skills by embedding it into the every day routine of the classroom.

Ask the children to dance or move around. Then when you say "stop" they have to come to a sudden stop and pretend they are pine trees.

This gets them to balance on a narrow base, whilst maintaining an upright posture, improving balance and building shoulder strength.

It's a quick and easy activity, which can have big benefits to your students.



# Helping children understand their feelings...

Research has found that if children are able to **put a name to an emotion** it goes a long way towards **dealing with the feeling**.

Sometimes children who have difficulty with motor skills **also find it difficult to read the emotion** of someone's face or in their body language.

Activities such as drawing **Feeling Faces** or playing **Feeling Statues**, where the children imitate emotions, are a great way to **help children identify a range of emotions**.

Start with simple to identify emotions such as **Happy, Sad, Angry and Tired** before moving to more subtle variations.

You could also include a few **silly games to promote laughter**. Laughing is so good for us on many levels.

If the children find it difficult to generate laughter themselves - start them off by watching some **funny YouTube videos**.

Being a good role model and naming your emotions and the techniques you use for dealing with those emotions is a positive way of teaching the children that both comfortable and uncomfortable feelings are a completely normal part of life.

*Module 9 in the Animal Fun program focuses on social emotional development in young children by providing the educator with some simple to use ideas for helping children to self regulate deep breathing and muscle relaxation meditation.*

# Muscle Relaxation

Resources: None.

**Starting Position:**  
Standing, sitting or lying on the floor.

**Movement:**

Tell the children that you will be doing the "rag doll" relaxation. You will be naming different parts of their bodies and asking them to tense them as hard as they can and then make them floppy like a rag doll. The children hold the tension for about 3 – 5 seconds before they relax each set of muscles.

**Fist and arms:** "Pretend you have 2 whole lemons in both your hands. Squeeze them really hard, try to squeeze all the juice out. Feel the tightness in your hand and arm as you squeeze. Now drop the lemon, and relax. See how much better your hands and arms feel when they are relaxed ..."

**Face and nose:** "Wrinkle up your face and nose until it looks like a prune. Feel the tightness in your nose, cheeks, forehead and chin. Then let your face relax – no more wrinkles."

**Stomach:** Imagine that an elephant is about to step on your stomach and you don't want the elephant to squash you – Make your stomach really tight and strong – so that the elephant will not squash you. Then let your stomach go soft again.

**Legs and feet:** Imagine that you are a stork and that you are stretching out your long legs to walk across a lake. Stretch your legs, your feet, and your toes as far as you can. Then relax and let them go floppy.



Starting Position



Squeeze fists



Wrinkle up face then relax



Stretch legs out as far as possible

Module 9: Easy

There are 97 activity cards in the resource pack. Each one has a different character and activity suggestions.



A muscle relaxing ....  
get it?



Additional support and resources for you and your classroom.

### Are you seeking Professional Development for your team?

We have three levels of support which include resources and professional development plus extras...



**Meerkat:** Short and Sweet  
Suitable for 1-2 Classes  
\$520 (+gst)



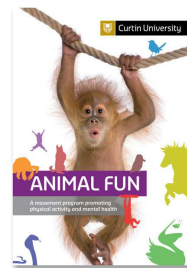
**Zebra:** Strong and Sturdy  
Suitable for 3-4 Classes  
\$990 (+gst)



**Lion:** King of the Jungle  
Suitable for whole Junior School. \$2,155 (+gst)

### Would you like to purchase resources for your classroom?

You can implement the Animal Fun program independently with these resources:



**Animal Fun Manual**  
\$120 (+gst)



**Animal Fun Activity Cards**  
\$120 (+gst)



**Animal Fun@Home**  
\$10 (+gst)

Making movement fun...

For further information get it touch:

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