



# Gross Motor & Creative Play for Children 2 to 5 Years of Age

A CIRKIDZ RESOURCE  
by Brittany Price and Ashleigh Green



# Definitions of Gross Motor and Creative Play

## GROSS MOTOR SKILLS/PLAY

Gross motor skills require whole body movement and involve the large core muscles of the body such as standing, walking, running, and sitting. It also includes eye-hand coordination skills such as throwing, catching and kicking. Gross motor play is any play that involves these large muscle groups and movements. Having good gross motor skills is an important building block for other areas such as school - being able to sit at a desk for long periods of time requires strong core muscles and posture, and is also necessary to be able to learn to write.

## CREATIVE PLAY

Creative play is any play that promotes self-expression and uses imagination as the basis of the play. Creative play can be done in numerous ways such as art, construction, movement (dance), pretend or dramatic play, role play (dress up) etc. Creative play is important for children to learn to express their emotions, ideas and to develop their sense of identity.

The Early Learning Years Framework (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace 2009) was developed to assist educators to provide young children with opportunities to maximise their potential and develop foundations for future success. Five learning outcomes were developed:

1. Children have a strong sense of identity
2. Children are connected with and contribute to their world
3. Children have a strong sense of wellbeing
4. Children are confident and involved learners
5. Children are effective communicators

At Cirkidz, children have opportunities to develop all five outcomes, as well as gaining the benefits from participating in gross motor and creative play through the Tiddlerz program in a well-rounded, holistic learning experience - as well as having fun!



# Cirkidz Tiddlerz Program

Cirkidz has many advantages and additional benefits for young children attending Tiddlerz & Big Tiddlerz classes compared to similar programs!

## Tiddlerz classes comprise of:

- A different creative theme and skill focus each week keeps classes interesting and builds upon new skills. Themes could include animals, and skill focus could include balancing, rolling, jumping etc
- A warm up and a game to get the body ready to play.
- 2 targeted obstacle courses (circuits) focus on different skills each week. This allows for multiple opportunities to master new skills, which is a clear advantage over similar programs which may only present one opportunity.
- Cool down - goodbye as a group which gives the children consistency and symbolises closure to sessions.
- Working with their 'big person' throughout the class allows the parent-child attachment to be strengthened.

Australian Physical Activity guidelines suggest that children aged 1-5 need 3 hours of play spread over a day, so Tiddlerz provides an hour of fun!

Classes are run by experienced trainers who have extended knowledge about correct use of circus- specific equipment and apparatus, as well as knowledge about how to execute correct movements safely such as somersaults etc.

Much of the equipment used in the classes are unique to Cirkidz and may not be found in other facilities. Equipment such as giant trampolines and specific circus apparatus such as spinning plates, poi, spring loaded floors, trapeze and tissues are just some of the equipment that the Tiddlerz get to experience in their class!

Class sizes are at a 1:10 ratio, which allows for trainers to give individualised attention and instruction to children, gives children more opportunity to participate in comparison to bigger classes, and smaller classes create a better sense of community and friendship between Tiddlerz and parents too.

Cirkidz members are also given the opportunity to extend their skills, and trial the performance aspect of circus classes through a performance at the end of the semester.



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# The benefits of gross motor and creative play for children aged between 2 to 5 years old.

- The definitions, benefits and use of play are broad and differ for individual families and children. For example, play as a whole can be defined in a range of different ways: Play is realistic, internally motivated, the individual controls play, it requires high functioning attention skills, focuses on the process rather than a final product, play is safe, usually fun, pleasurable, unpredictable and spontaneous.
- Play, as a whole, is essential to a child's cognitive, physical, social and emotional well-being and development.
- Gross motor and creative play specifically; encourage children to use their creativity while developing their imagination, physical, cognitive and emotional capacities. Play is also crucial for healthy brain development. Providing a combination of free play and planned gross motor experiences will support children to develop physically strong, healthy bodies and minds.
- These types of play are also believed to facilitate an understanding of a culture, flexibility in thinking, adaptability, learning, problem solving, exploring and gaining a sense of mastery over one's environment, information integration from the environment, and the development of social, intellectual, emotional and physical skills.



- Gross motor and creative play allows children to create and explore a world they can master, conquering their fears in conjunction with other children and parents or caregivers. As children master their world, play helps children develop new competencies that lead to the increase and development of numerous other skills and abilities, for example, enhanced confidence and resilience which are crucial in order to successfully face future challenges.
- Although Cirkidz is considered 'structured' play (where children are told what to do on what equipment), the play remains child driven, which allows children to practice decision-making skills, learn risk-analysing behaviours, resolve conflicts, negotiate and share.
- Gross motor and creative play have undeniable importance in child development and promoting health in children, for example, gross motor and creative play contribute to the personal growth and balanced development of physical, cognitive, emotional and social characteristics. The engagement in different gross motor and creative play activities also offers and promotes learning experience which allow children to communicate, perceive and gain knowledge about the world, build self-awareness and identity, develop independence, and express their own needs, reactions and emotions.





## Ideas for Gross Motor Play Activities at Home

Below is a list of simple activities you can do with your children at home to help develop their gross motor skills in a fun way, and why it is helpful for them!

- **Obstacle course:** great for a whole body experience including building core and body strength, balance, body awareness (child's understanding of where their body parts are in space and how these positions relate to one another), hand-eye coordination, motor planning (planning what movements they are going to do) and visual-motor integration (combining what they can see with what they can do).
- **Dancing games:** i.e. bob and freeze or statues: good for body awareness, balance, confidence and self-expression. Encourage balancing on one foot and jumping while dancing!
- **Hopscotch:** good for core strength/balance and ability to use both sides of body together or separately - called bilateral integration. Use masking tape for indoors and chalk for outdoors!
- **Simon Says:** good for body awareness and a great game for developing gross motor skills through large movements.
- **Wheelbarrow or crab walks:** develops upper limb/core strength and encourages coordination.
- **Catching and balancing games:** i.e. bean bags into buckets or throwing balls at targets: builds core strength and develops hand-eye coordination.
- **Playground activities:** specifically climbing and swinging: great for confidence, body awareness, upper limb strength, concentration, stimulates the vestibular sense which is important for balance and coordination.

## Equipment found at home

Below are some ideas on how to make your own equipment for gross motor play at home. Try making equipment with your child!

- Markers- ice cream containers, upside down bowls, plastic soft drink bottles filled with water or sand, end of plastic pipes.
- Bats - rolled up newspaper, cardboard tubes from glad wrap/alfoil or chop up pool noodles.
- Balls - crush paper and bind with masking tape, roll old socks together filled with scrap materials or fill stocking with ball and tie to a post.
- Bean bags - tie rice or sand into a zip lock or freezer bag and sew into material to make easy bean bags. Putting the bag of rice/sand into a tied up sock works well too!
- Obstacle course indoor equipment ideas- chairs to crawl under, cushions to jump on, masking tape lines to balance on or jump over, boxes to climb, use flattened pizza boxes as stepping stones or bases, throw rolled up socks into basket, crawl through a fort (chairs and sheets).
- Obstacle course outdoor equipment ideas - hoops to crawl through, ropes or sticks to jump over, chairs to crawl under, sacks to jump in, tyres to balance on, boxes to jump off, brooms/mops/pool noodles for limbo bars - anything you can think of!
- Skittles - plastic drink bottles and a ball made from materials mentioned earlier!
- Quoits - using paper plates or alfoil pie tins with the middles cut out and a stick/plastic bottle to throw on. Wrap the edges with masking tape if they need more weight.

# Acro Activities

At Cirkidz, children can learn how to perform acrobatics with their 'big person'. Doing activities with your child can help build a sense of trust, confidence, persistence and risk taking in a safe way - which are all important attributes for child development. Here are some easy examples you can do at home with your child!

The following activities were taken from the book *Jack's Acrobatics* by R Taeymans & L van Bouchout.

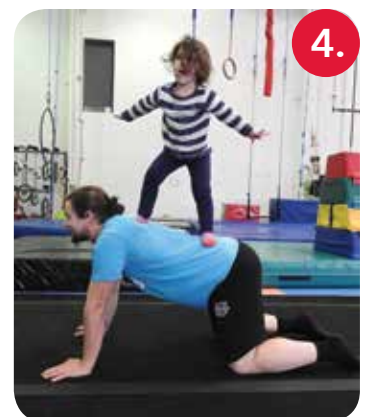
## THE WALKING SOMERSAULT P. 20

Child grabs onto big person's hands, with child and big person facing each other. Child walks up big person's body, and flips backwards into a somersault.



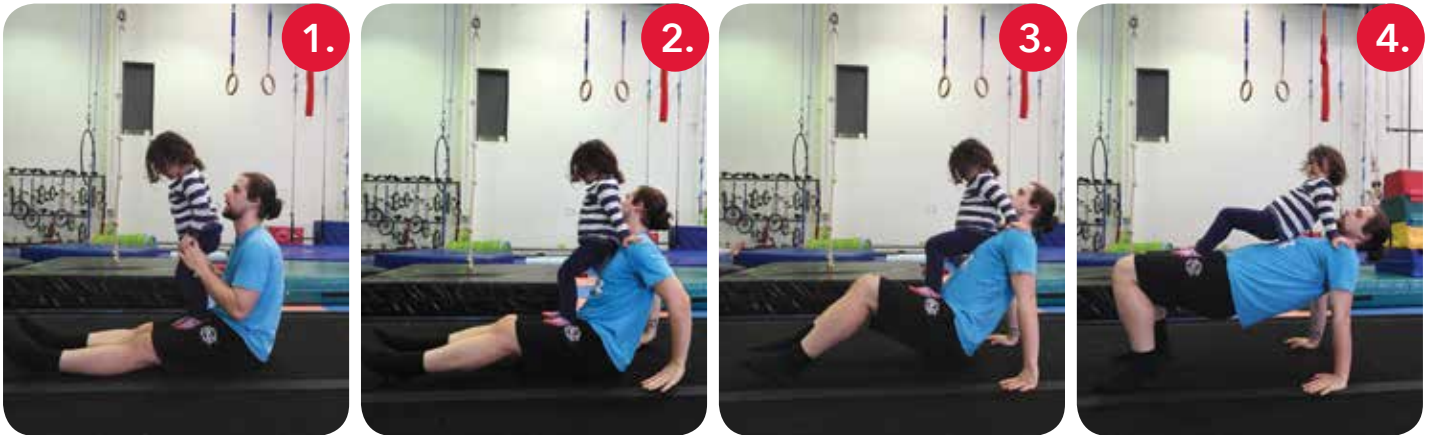
## PONY PYRAMID P. 36

Big person is on hands and knees on floor. Child to climb onto big person's back, and place one foot in between big person's shoulders and one foot on big person's bottom. Child can stand up and raise arms in the air. Child could also go on hands and knees on big person's back. Dismount by jumping off from standing position.



## BUNK BED P. 40

Big person to sit on floor with hands behind them on floor, and knees bent with feet on floor. Child to sit on big person's knees, facing big person. Child to place feet on big person's shoulders, and on the count of three - both to push tummies up. Big person will now be on hands and feet as a base for child to have hands on big person's knees and feet on big person's stomach (depending on how tall they are).



## THE BEST LADDER P. 42

Big person kneels on left knee with right foot on floor in front of them. Big person and child to grab each other's right hand like a handshake. Then grab left hands, and child to step up onto big person's thigh. Child to place left foot on big person's left shoulder, and big person to pull hands up as child places other foot on right shoulder. Child's feet should be close to neck, and big person can stand. If confident, big person can let go of child's hands and grab the back of their knees and pull towards back of head to hold them up. To dismount, big person to return to lunge position.



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AND CIRCUS  
PERFORMER  
EVIE!

# Ideas for Creative Play Activities at Home

As previously mentioned, creative play is any play that promotes self-expression and uses imagination as the basis of the play. Below are some ideas of different creative play ideas that can be easily done at home with your child!

## ART & CONSTRUCTION

- Making a family with empty toilet rolls, small plastic juice bottles or rocks. Draw on faces, stick on paper clothes and use wool or grass for hair. Encourage to make stories with the people after making them.
- Make use of found and natural materials! Collect fallen leaves for your child to draw, glue onto paper or dip into paint.
- Use small plastic lids, patty pan cases and other 'threadables' with your child to make jewellery and then role play from this i.e. playing shops.
- Painting using cotton bud tips or scrunched up balls of foil for stamping paper with paint.

## MUSIC, MOVEMENT AND DANCE

- Put on some music that will get your child moving! Get on the ground with your child and start crawling, seat-sliding, rolling etc. together. Join your toddler and jump, run, gallop and skip around the room together. Go at your child's speed. While you're moving, you can sing along, beat a box with a wooden spoon or other instruments.
- Put on music from other countries and talk about it with your child.
- Use ribbons attached to hair ties for a fun dancing prop. This will also encourage the child to move their arms which will build up strength.
- Make your own instruments! Drums out of ice cream containers, guitars out of tissue boxes and rubber bands, trumpets out of paper towel rolls, tambourines out of foil pie plates, dry rice into containers as shakers, forks and spoons off coat hanger for a triangle.
- Sing nurse rhymes or silly made up songs whilst changing nappies, making meals for them, getting dressed etc. You could sing songs about animals, pets, events, stories or people. Encourage your child to listen to the music and your singing. This will help them to develop speech and language.
- Songs with active movements will help with self-expression and body awareness. Try songs such as 'Head & Shoulders, Knees & Toes', 'Pat-a-cake' and 'If You're Happy & You Know It'.

## PRETEND PLAY

- Create cubby houses or forts out of clothes horses, chairs, tables, pillows and/or sheets.
- Use cardboard boxes to make cars - add a paper plate for a steering wheel!
- Play fisherman with sticks and string - if you're feeling creative, glue small magnets onto some paper fish and attach a paper clip to the end of the string to play fishing!
- Pretend to be hairdressers/chefs and kitchens/teachers and schools - role play is good for building on familiar territory and children can be more creative upon situations they already know.
- The possibilities are endless! It is important to remember that the play should be led by your child, and not the other way around. You can set up the environment for them to play in, but should not tell them how to play. This dampens the fun and creativity!



## Parent Testimonials

- 19 parents said that their children have improved confidence
- 12 parents said that their children's listening skills have improved
- 9 parents said that their child's coordination has improved
- 9 parents said that Cirkidz is a great space for their children to take risks

Put on some music that will get your child moving! Get on the ground with your child and start crawling, seat-sliding, rolling etc. together. Join your toddler and jump, run, gallop and skip around the room together.

*'London has learnt structure and new activities. She has also gained new friends.'*

*'[Cirkidz] Encourages play. Assists Nahla with her speech development. Encourages children to take safe risks.'*

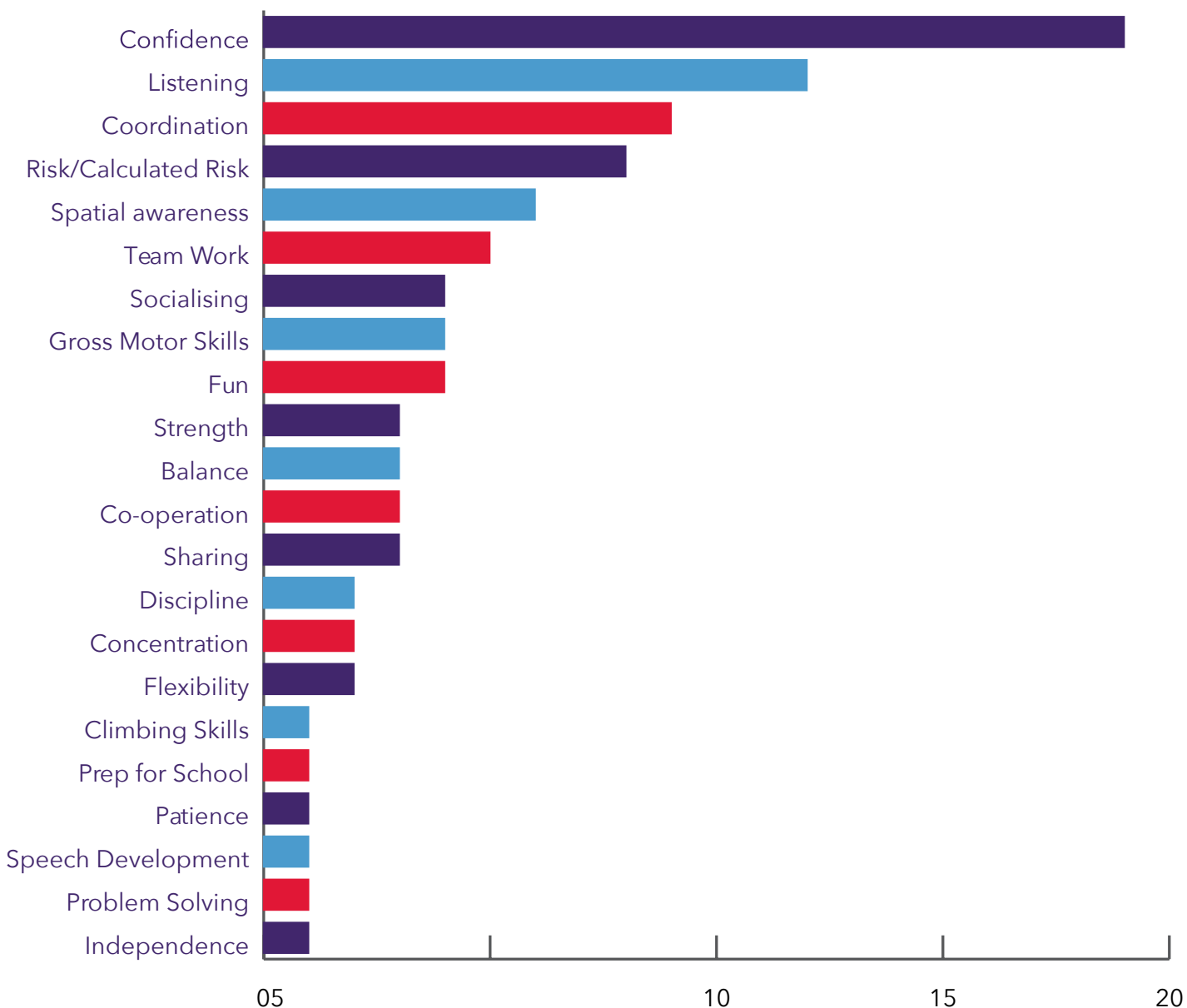
*'Learning balance and climbing skills which helps with confidence on playground. Learning to pay attention - good prep for school.'*

*'Confidence builder. Exercise great for flexibility. Following instructions good for discipline.'*

**MAJOR THEMES FROM THE PARENTS INCLUDED (IN ORDER):**

- Confidence
- Listening
- Coordination
- Risk/ Calculated risk
- Spatial awareness
- Team work
- Socialising
- Gross motor skills
- Fun
- Strength
- Balance
- Co-operation
- Sharing
- Discipline
- Concentration
- Flexibility
- Climbing skills
- Prep for school
- Patience
- Speech development
- Problem solving
- Independence

*Thank you to all of the Tiddlerz families at Cirkidz for their participation in this study*



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Cirkidz is a not-for-profit organisation that was founded in 1986 to provide meaningful recreation and community engagement opportunities for disadvantaged youth. Thirty years later... we are still empowering young people and enhancing their social, physical and creative development through value based training and a lot of fun!

For more information on Cirkidz or to discuss your child's individual circus journey, please give us a call on 8346 5735 or visit [www.cirkidz.org.au](http://www.cirkidz.org.au) for more information.

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