When I Move, I'm Learning

Connecting Movement, Play & Early Development

Movement is how infants and toddlers make sense of their world. Every roll, reach, climb, and crawl strengthens both body and brain. Thoughtful classroom environments and responsive adults can amplify these moments through language, encouragement, and purposefully chosen materials.

Use these resource cards to highlight the connection between gross motor activities and physical and cognitive development, with Teacher Talk prompts and suggestions for materials that support exploration.

BECKER'S

WHEN I HAVE TUMMY TIME...

I'm building strength, stability, and awareness.

I'm learning to lift my head, push up on my arms, and look around.

I'm strengthening my neck, shoulders, and core, muscles that prepare me for rolling, sitting, crawling, and exploring.

I'm developing visual skills as I look, reach, and track objects nearby.

I'm learning to coordinate what I see with how my body moves.

Teacher Talk

You're lifting your head and pushing up with your arms! Are you watching your ball roll?

Encourage these skills by offering:

- soft mats or padded play surfaces
- mirrors and accordion books that stand upright
- high contrast toys to encourage gentle stretching and reaching

WHEN I ROLL...

I'm building coordination, strength and control.

I'm building core strength and coordination as I twist, push, and shift my weight.

I'm developing body awareness and balance through new positions and perspectives.

I'm exploring cause and effect, realizing that my own movements make things happen.

I'm processing input from the vestibular (movement), tactile (touch), and visual systems to make sense of motion and stability.

Teacher Talk

You pushed with your legs and turned your body ! Rolling helps you get where you want to go.

You found a new way to see the room. Everything looks different from this side!

Encourage these skills by offering:

- soft mats or padded play surfaces
- low wedge or gentle ramp to encourage rolling and shifting
- textured blankets, tummy time mirrors, or soft balls to invite reaching, pushing, and turning

BECKER'S

WHEN I CRAWL...

I'm building strength, motor planning and sense of balance.

I'm learning how to use both sides of my body together, which helps me with later skills like walking, climbing, and writing.

I'm exploring space and distance, discovering how far I can go and how my body fits in different places.

I'm strengthening my senses by feeling the floor beneath me, seeing where I'm going, and responding to movement.

Teacher Talk

You're moving your hands and knees together! You made it all the way to the ball!

Encourage these skills by offering:

- lightweight balls, shakers, or textured toys to motivate reaching and forward motion
- mirrors at floor level so babies can see themselves move and build body awareness
- soft mats, ramps, and low platforms that invite safe movement and exploration
- tunnels, arches, or pillows to crawl under, over, and through

BECKER'S

WHEN I START TO CRUISE...

I'm practicing balance, exploring space, and developing independence, one supported step at a time.

I'm balancing while holding on, shifting my weight, and taking my first side steps.
I'm strengthening my legs, core, and coordination as I move between steadying objects.
I'm judging space while reaching from one support to another.
I'm planning my movements and building confidence for independent walking.

Teacher Talk *You let go and reached for the next table. You knew just how far you could stretch!*

Encourage these skills by offering:

- sturdy, low furniture like shelves or activity tables that invite supported standing and side-stepping
- push toys or walking wagons that provide stability for early walkers
- soft play structures and mats that allow for safe cruising, climbing, and stepping between levels
- clear, open pathways for safe exploration and opportunities to transition between supports

BECKER'S

WHEN I CLIMB...

I'm testing limits, building muscles, and discovering new perspectives.

I'm using strength, balance, and coordination across my whole body.
I'm planning and sequencing my movements as I figure out how to go up, over, and down.
I'm building confidence as I test limits and experience safe risk-taking.
I'm developing spatial awareness and problem-solving skills through trial and error.
I'm trusting my body and the supportive adults who keep me safe while I explore.

Teacher Talk *You looked for a place to put your foot. You're figuring out how to get to the top!*

Encourage these skills by offering:

- soft climbers, ramps, and platforms that support safe, active exploration
- cushioned mats or foam blocks for climbing up, over, and through
- sturdy furniture or gross motor equipment that allows supervised climbing and descending

BECKER'S