

Balance

Description

Balance is attained when the centre of gravity is over the base of support. There are two types of balance: 1. **static** balance – involves maintaining a desired shape in a stationary position (e.g. handstand in gymnastics); and 2. **dynamic** balance – involves the control of the body as it moves in space. All movements require some sort of static balance, from which all controlled movement originates and is managed through effective posture and muscular contractions and relaxation.



The ability to balance, whether stationary or moving, is a key to success in most sports and physical activities.

Applying movement principles

Balance

- for stationary balance, the centre of gravity needs to be over the base of support
- the wider the base of support and the closer the centre of gravity is to the base of support, the easier it is to balance
- when body parts extend to one side beyond the base of support, the body needs to make a corresponding extension in the opposite direction to achieve counterbalance

Learning cues

- establish a wide base of support (feet or hands)
- lower body – bend knees or arms to lower the centre of gravity
- extend body parts to help counterbalance
- focus eyes on an object to help balance
- tighten (contract) muscles to hold balance

Learning phases

Discovering phase

Children enjoy discovering balancing on the spot, while moving, making different body shapes on equipment and with others. Characteristics of balancing for the beginner phase are:

- children tend to look down at their feet
- overcompensate body parts to balance, (e.g. waving arms wildly)
- can balance with support
- balance is attained sporadically.

Developing phase

Children develop more confidence in balancing by practising different balances in problem-solving activities and balancing with others. Characteristics of balancing in this learning phase are:

- eyes focus more on apparatus or target
- children lose balance less often
- arms used to balance
- static balance is achieved more often on the dominant leg
- children have dynamic balance – they can balance forwards and backwards, with considerable concentration and effort.

Consolidating phase

Applying the skills of balancing to games and sports like gymnastics is the focus of this learning phase. Children have become confident and proficient in balancing, demonstrating:

- eyes focus on external target
- arms and other body parts used to counterbalance
- static balance is achieved with eyes closed and on both legs
- in dynamic balance, movement is fluid and confident, and involves an alternate stepping action.

Overview

Learning phase	Activity name	Movement skills/concept	Suggested group size	Suggested space	Page
Discovering	Let's Have Fun with Body Shapes	Static balance, body and space awareness.	1	Level hard or grass area	131
	How do we Balance?	Static balance, dynamic balance, body and space awareness.	1	Level hard or grass area	132
	Balancing with Equipment	Static balance, body and space awareness, and relationships (with equipment).	1-3	Level hard or grass area	134
	Let's Move while Balancing	Dynamic balance, static balance, space awareness, weight transfer and weight bearing, body awareness and relationships (with equipment).	1	Level hard or grass area	136
	Climbing – It's a Balancing Act!	Dynamic balance, climbing at different levels, on equipment, in general space and in different directions.	1-5	Level hard or grass area	138
Developing	Freeze	Static and dynamic balance, relationships (with others), body and space awareness.	4	Level hard or grass area	139
	Connect It	Static and dynamic balance, body awareness, space awareness and relationships (with others).	1-2	Level hard or grass area	140
	Puzzle Balances	Static balance, balancing on different body parts, problem solving, body and space awareness.	1-3	Level hard or grass area	141
	Statics	Static balance, body and space awareness.	2-3	Level hard or grass area	142
	Cooperative Balances	Static balance, counterbalance, body and space awareness, problem solving and relationships (with others).	2	Level hard or grass area	144
	Climbing on Equipment	Dynamic balance, climbing on equipment at varying heights, angles and spaces.	1-5	Area with safe landing surface	146

Learning phase	Activity name	Movement skills/concept	Suggested group size	Suggested space	Page
Consolidating	Inverted Balances	Inverted static balance, body and space awareness.	1	Area with safe landing surface	147
	Connect Five	Cooperative balances, counterbalance, space and body awareness and relationships (with others).	5-7	Level hard or grass area	148
	Balance Circuit	Dynamic and static balance, space awareness and relationships (with others and equipment).	1-4	Level hard or grass area	149
	Partner Support Balances	Cooperative balances, counterbalance, space and body awareness and relationships (with others).	2	Level hard or grass area	151
	Balancing on Hanging Ropes	Balancing using equipment, body and space awareness.	1	Area with safe landing surface	152

Discovering Balance

Let's Have Fun with Body Shapes

Movement skills/concepts

Static balance, body and space awareness.

Set-up

Mats.

Children, each with a mat, are spread out in a defined area with an even surface.

Activity

Who can balance while making ...?

- a narrow/wide/twisted/curl shape with your body in a standing position
- the same shape as above but resting on other part(s) of the body, (e.g. a wide shape while your hands and feet are on the ground)
- a wide shape with your upper body and a narrow shape with your lower body
- a twisted shape with your upper body and a curled shape with your lower body
- a symmetrical/asymmetrical shape
- a shape at different levels – low, medium and high
- the shape of a letter of the alphabet, (e.g. X, T, C, F, I, L, O, V, Y)
- a number shape, (e.g. 7, 6, 2)
- the shape of the first letter of your name or your favourite number



Can you see ...?

- children being creative
- tight muscles
- balancing like a statue – not moving
- eyes up



You could ask ...

Which body shape made it easy to balance?

Could you be pushed over in that shape?

Which body shape made it easy to be pushed over?

Variations

Create a shape story: Make up a travelling shape story, (e.g. move from a wide shape to a twisted shape to a curled shape). Keep the transitions smooth.

Make group shapes: As a small group, form simple three or four-letter words, (e.g. OAR, BIRD, SUN, CAT, MAN).

How do we Balance?

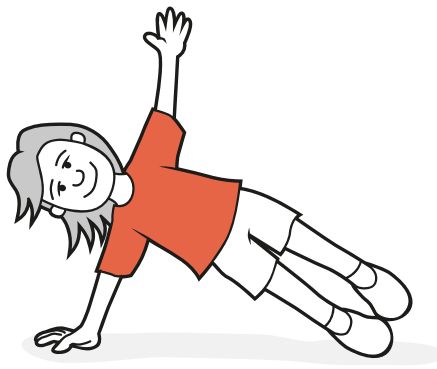
Movement skills/concepts

Static balance, dynamic balance, body and space awareness.

Set-up

Mats.

Children, each with a space on a mat, are scattered around an area with an even surface.



Activity

Can you balance ...?

- on one body part, (e.g. on your side, back, front, shoulders, knees)
- as above but with your eyes closed
- while moving your weight from one body part to another part, (e.g. from one foot, to your tummy, to your back)
- on two body parts, (e.g. on one hand and one knee)
- on three body parts, (e.g. on one elbow, one foot and one knee)
- as above while holding for three seconds (count 'alligators' or 'thousand' as one second)
- on two/three body parts that are on the same/different sides of the body
- at different levels – low, medium and high
- starting low, moving to a high position and finishing with a low position
- on one foot and change the position of your arms, bottom and other foot
- while changing the position of your base, (e.g. start with balance on two feet, move one in front of the other, lower your level, now bring feet close together and raise your level)
- while travelling through space in any way you choose (e.g. walking, hopping, like a robot), then, on a signal, creating a static balance, (e.g. balance on different body parts, making different shapes and at different levels)

Can you see ...?

- tight muscles
- balancing like a statue – not moving

You could ask ...

Which sort of balance gave you the best base of support?

Which sort of balance was easy to hold for three seconds?

Variations

Combine balances: Create your own balance story, (e.g. change from a one-body-part balance to a three-body-part balance to a four-body-part balance). Hold each one for three seconds.

Add levels and shapes to balance story: For example, move from a one-body-part balance at a high level, to a two-body-part balance in a wide shape, to a three-body-part balance at a low level.

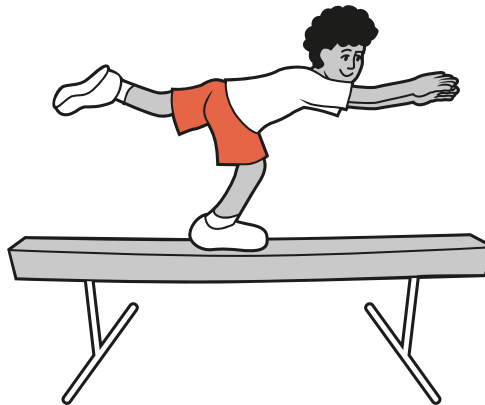
Balancing with Equipment

Movement skills/concepts

Static balance, body and space awareness, and relationships (with equipment).

Set-up

Mats, benches, discs/bases, beanbags, balls, foam frisbees.



Activity 1: On-the-spot balance

Children are scattered throughout an area while standing on a disc/base, where there is also some equipment (beanbag, ball and foam frisbee).

- choose one piece of equipment and try to balance it on any body part while standing on your spot
- balance one of the objects on your head while standing on one foot and staying on your spot
- balancing only on your bottom, balance a ball between your feet while keeping your feet off the ground

Activity 2: Bench balance

Each small group of approximately three–four children stands beside a low bench. In turn, children step up onto the middle of the bench and hold a balance for three seconds.

- vary the type of balance (e.g. shapes – wide, narrow, levels – low, medium, high and body parts – one foot, bottom, two hands, one knee)
- be creative (e.g. pose like a ballerina, Superman, a tennis player, or any other sporting or dancing star)

Can you see ...?

- tight muscles
- being as still as possible
- balancing with arms extended out to side (aeroplane arms)

You could ask ...

How can you keep very still when you are balancing?

What did you do to keep your feet off the floor in the sitting balance?

Variations

Combine balances: Move from one balance to another, holding each for three seconds (count 'one thousand' as one second).

Combine balances with travelling: Balance on one spot with one object (e.g. balance on one foot with object on head), then travel to another spot still balancing the object (e.g. walking with the object on head), then choose another balance with another object (e.g. balance on shoulders with legs off the ground balancing a ball).

Let's Move while Balancing

Movement skills/concepts

Dynamic balance, static balance, space awareness, weight transfer and weight bearing, body awareness and relationships (with equipment).

Set-up

A variety of equipment or playground/gymnastic apparatus, such as low benches, ropes, hoops, bars, low fence, wobble boards. Also playground markings like grids, or patterns etc.

Children are spread out in a level hard or grass area.



Activity

Who can ...?

- travel with only one/two/three body part(s) touching the ground – on a signal, freeze in that position and hold for three seconds
- travel around the room like a crab, or a monkey, or a bear – on a signal, freeze in that shape and hold for three seconds
- put weight on different points, (e.g. elbows, knees, head)
- put weight on different surfaces, (e.g. back, tummy side)
- move from one surface to another, (e.g. back to tummy)
- move from points to a surface, (e.g. foot to back)
- travel along lines, ropes, a line of blocks or around a hoop
- walk along a low bench/beam – stop and hold a balance for three seconds
- walk along an inclined bench
- balance on an unstable base, (e.g. wobble board)

Can you see ...?

- head up – point of focus
- arms extended out to side (aeroplane arms)
- good posture – tight muscles

You can ask ...

How can you keep your balance when you are walking along a line or a low bench?

Variations

Go on a balance journey: For example, travel around the room (bear walk or hopping) moving on, off, over, under and around the equipment. On a signal, balance in a certain way on the nearest apparatus (e.g. balance like a bear).

Climbing – it's a Balancing Act!

Movement skills/concepts

Dynamic balance, climbing at different levels, on equipment, in general space and in different directions.

Set-up

Hoops, ladder, steps, hand and foot cut-outs or animal footprints.

Individuals or small groups start at different points of a smooth surface circuit.



Activity

Children practise the following activities in the circuit.

Mirror games: In pairs, one person does an arm or leg action and the other mirrors this action. How fast can you move?

Climbing steps: Make steps from equipment, or use existing steps with cut-out hand/foot shapes, which children move over with hand/foot crawling action.

Hoop patterns: Set up a trail of hoops which children follow on all fours, placing only one hand or one foot in a hoop at a time.

Horizontal ladder: On all fours, children conduct a firefighter rescue by moving along a drawn ladder, or a real ladder horizontally placed, and rescuing an object (e.g. teddy/doll) at the end.

Can you see ...?

- alternate, independent foot and leg action
- safe surface for hands
- frequent breaks from walking on the hands

You could ask ...

What did you enjoy about climbing?

Did you find any activities difficult? Why was this?

Developing Balance

Freeze

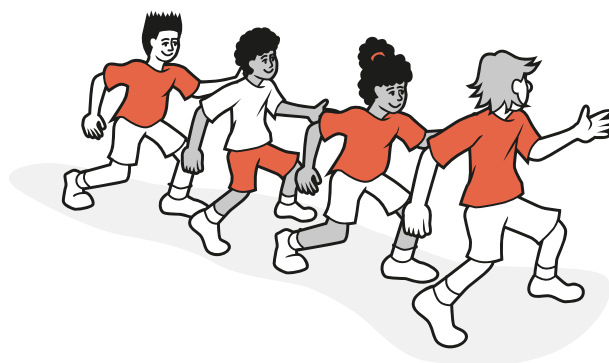
Movement skills/concepts

Static and dynamic balance, relationships (with others), body and space awareness.

Set-up

Hard or grass surface.

Each group of four stands in a line with a leader at the front.



Activity

The group walks or jogs a short distance behind the leader. When the leader turns around, all the followers 'freeze' on the spot.

Any children who move or who are slow to stop collect a 'thaw' point.

Repeat several times – the leader can change the type of movement to skipping or galloping etc. Change the leader after several turns.

Who can avoid collecting any thaw points?

Can you see ...?

- quick reactions
- using space
- tight muscles
- stable base
- eyes on leader

You could ask ...

What can you do to freeze suddenly when the leader turns?

Can you hold your shape for three seconds?

Variations

Vary movement: Change the type of movement after each stop, (e.g. to hopping, crawling).

Vary body shape: Leader nominates some kind of statue position, which the children assume, (e.g. ballerina, tall shape, stretched elastic).

Connect It

Movement skills/concepts

Static and dynamic balance, body awareness, space awareness and relationships (with others).

Set-up

Children are spread out in a defined area on a hard or grass surface.



Activity 1: Connecting yourself

Children walk freely about the area. On a signal, they stop and listen to the coach/teacher calling out two body parts, which each child then has to join together. Examples include: elbow to knee, hand to foot, foot to foot, hand to shoulder, head to hand, knee to ankle, foot to head.

Activity 2: Connecting in pairs

In pairs, children travel around the area in a designated way (e.g. walking or skipping) while joined together (linking arms). On a signal, the pairs connect to each other by the body parts called by the coach/teacher. Examples include: two feet (one foot from each partner in the pair), two hands, one foot and one knee, one shoulder and one head, one elbow and one hip, one ankle and one knee.

Can you see ...?

- head up – focused on an object or spot
- tight muscles

You could ask ...?

What do you need to do with your body to maintain your balance?

How can you and your partner work together to maintain your balance?

Variations

Vary the way of travelling around in space: Use different dynamic balance activities, (e.g. kangaroo walk, crazy crab, monkey walk).

Vary body shapes and levels: Include narrow/wide body shapes and low/medium/tall levels.

Puzzle Balances

Movement skills/concepts

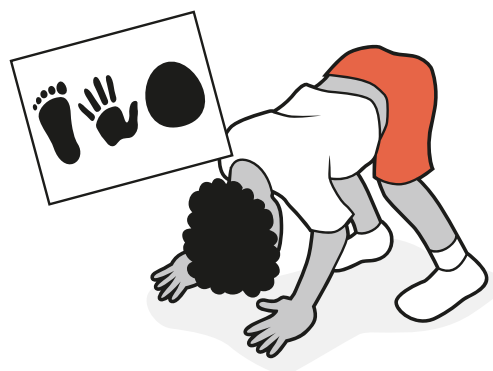
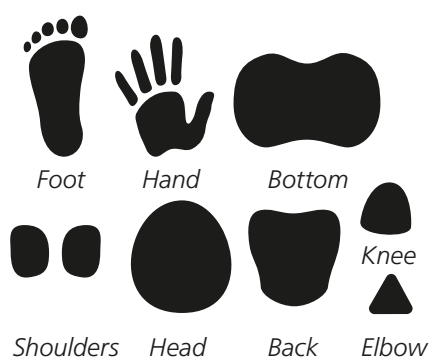
Static balance, balancing on different body parts, problem solving, body and space awareness.

Set-up

Mats.

Even surface in a defined hard or grass surface area.

Prepare a set of small cards with two or more symbols on each card, chosen so that it is possible to achieve a balance from that combination. Below are some ideas for symbols that could be used.



Examples of cards and balance

- two feet and two elbows
- head, two hands and two feet
- bottom and two hands
- one knee and one foot

Activity

Children take a sheet with a series of puzzle balances and see how many balances they can do to solve the puzzle, using mats provided.

Can you see ...?

- head up – focused on object
- stillness
- tight muscles
- avoidance of activities that put pressure on neck

You could ask ...

What do you need to do with the body parts that are not part of your base of support?

What do you need to do to maintain your balance?

Variations

Create a sequence: Move from puzzle balance to puzzle balance to create a sequence.

Work in pairs or small groups: Group members instruct each other (verbally) about how to do the puzzle balances.

Statics

Movement skills/concepts

Static balance, body and space awareness.

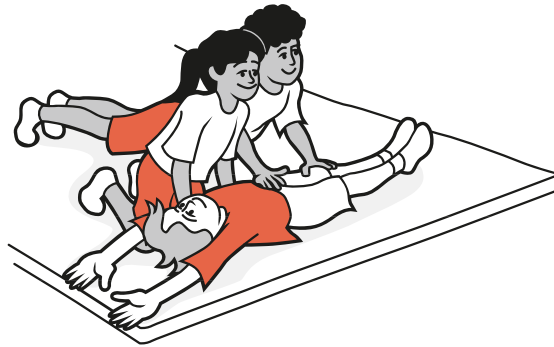
Set-up

Mats.

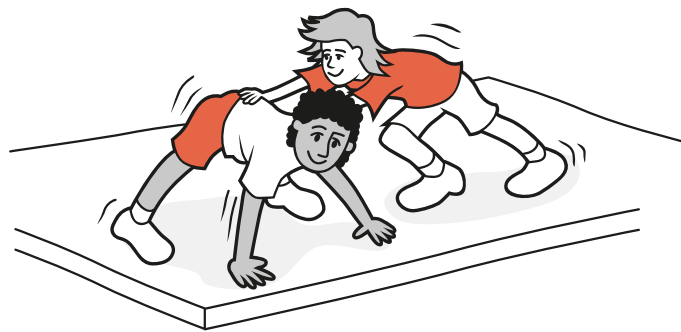
Children in pairs or groups of three, with a mat per pair/group on a hard, even surface.

Activity

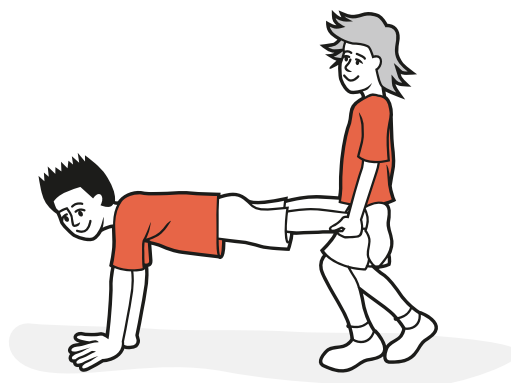
The object of this activity is to maintain a tight body position in each stance.



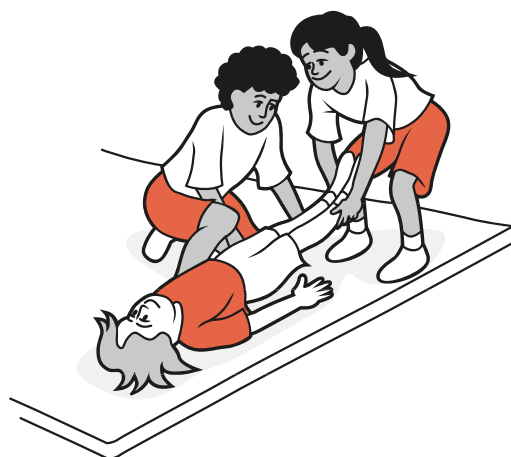
Immovable rock: One child (the rock) lies on their back on the mat with a straight body, arms above head. Two partners try to roll the rock over, while the rock resists by keeping a tight body. Switch roles and repeat.



Tip the spider: In pairs, one child (the spider) is on all fours forming a stable bridge. The partner attempts to tip over the spider. Switch roles and repeat.



Wheelbarrow lift: In pairs, one child is the wheelbarrow who is in a tight front support position. Their partner should grasp the wheelbarrow's legs around the knee joint and lift no higher than their own thighs (approximately 50 cm).



Lift the plank: In groups of three, one child (the plank) lies on their back on the floor with a tight straight body and arms by their side. Partners try to lift the plank no higher than knee height.

Can you see ...?

- tight muscles
- lifting with knees and straight back

You could ask ...

How do you lift safely without hurting your back?

To keep a straight body, what do you need to do?

Variations

Standing immovable rock: In pairs, children take turns at standing in an upright, stable position – partners try to push them over.

Cooperative Balances

Movement skills/concepts

Static balance, counterbalance, body and space awareness, problem solving and relationships (with others).

Set-up

Benches, box tops, mats and balls.

Children are in pairs of approximately the same height and size. Each pair has a mat or a defined area to work in.



Activity

With a partner, explore how many ways you can balance.

Repeat with only one base of support for each partner.

Repeat one more time, this time without using your foot as a base of support (e.g. using back or hands).

Can you balance with your partner – on a line, bench/box top, or crash pad with only ...?

- two feet on the ground
- two hands and one foot
- one foot and two knees
- one back and one foot

With your partner, can you be the shape of ...?

- an apple tree
- a yacht
- a letter of the alphabet – try A, D, G, J, P, U – or a number

Can you perform the 'dead bug carry'? One partner kneels on all fours and the other lies on their back on top. The person underneath then moves around.

Create a sequence of balances, moving smoothly from one balance to another.

In groups of 3 or 5, create a pyramid

Can you see ...?

- counterbalance
- wide base of support
- slow control when engaging and disengaging
- pairs matched for height and weight

You could ask ...

What do you need to do to balance with your partner safely and under control?

How can you and your partner counterbalance?

Variations

Vary equipment: Balance in pairs using a ball or rope.

Mirror image balances: In pairs, each partner mirrors the other's shape.

Climbing on Equipment

Movement skills/concepts

Dynamic balance, climbing on equipment at varying heights, angles and spaces.

Set-up

Ropes, ladders, bars, poles, climbing net. Available playground/gymnastic equipment.

Individuals or small groups start at different points of a circuit.

Activity

Horizontal ladders: Children move along on all fours, facing downwards and upwards.

Jungle gym and similar equipment: Mark a course on the equipment with numbered tags to follow either in a set order or in any order.

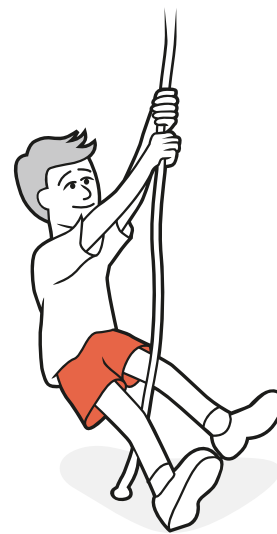
Inclined equipment: Children follow a circuit of ladders, nets, benches, parallel pipes, etc. They then try it in reverse order or help an 'injured' partner around.

Vertical ladders/wall bars: Children climb up and down, climb up, across/through and down.

Low, horizontal rope: With a rope over a slippery surface, children lie on their back and pull along with a hand-over-hand action.

Vertical ropes: From sitting on the floor, children pull up hand over hand to standing, then lower hand over hand to sitting.

Combination climbs: Set up an obstacle course using ropes, ladders, bars, nets, beams, boxes, outdoor equipment, etc. Climb this in different ways.



Can you see ...?

- alternate, independent foot and leg action
- safe surface for hands
- frequent breaks from walking on the hands
- creative play – children exploring and discovering equipment

You could ask ...

How do you adjust your climbing action when climbing up a rope compared to climbing on a fixed structure?

What was the most difficult equipment to climb? Why was this?

Consolidating Balance

Inverted Balances

Movement skills/concepts

Inverted static balance, body and space awareness.

Set-up

Wall, chairs, safety mats.

Mats are scattered in a defined area, with children sharing each mat.

Activity

Shoulder stand: Start in a crouched position with fingers touching the mat. Rock back so your bottom, then back, then shoulders touch the floor. Support your weight by bending your arms at the elbows and supporting your hips with your hands. Hold for 3 seconds and then slowly roll back into crouched position.

Tripod balance: Start in a crouched position, make a triangle with your hands and head, and walk one knee and then the other onto your elbows. Weight is on the crown of your head, not your forehead. 'Squeeze' your fingers.

Handstand: Stand with your back against a wall. Beginning in a squat position, place your hands flat on the mat, keeping your arms straight. Walk up the wall then down, keeping a tight body.

Kick ups: Face the wall, one foot in front of the other (front-back stance). Lean forward and place your hands down on the mat, shoulder width apart and fingers pointing forwards. Using your back leg as a lever, kick your leg upward so that the weight is supported by your arms. Come down safely by twisting your trunk slightly to bring feet down in a new place.

Can you see ...?

- wide base of support
- tight body
- control when engaging and disengaging
- support where needed

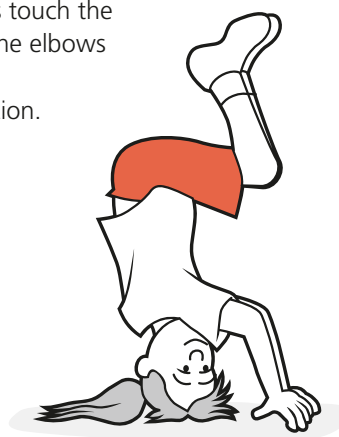
You could ask ...

What do you need to do to balance in an inverted position?

What are some ways you can safely come out of a balance? Show me.

Variations

Inverted balance on equipment: Do a shoulder stand between two chairs. Make sure that the chairs are stable, and that support is available.



Connect Five

Movement skills/concepts

Cooperative balances, counterbalance, space and body awareness, and relationships (with others).

Set-up

Area with an even surface.

Groups of five or seven.



Activity

One child starts off the activity by selecting a balance with a wide base of support. In turn, each other child adds to the statue by slowly making another shape (wide/narrow/curled/twisted) touching the first statue with one body part.

Once the group balance statue is complete, on a signal each child (except the first one) moves slowly away from the original single-child statue, using a locomotor or turning action.

On a signal, each child moves slowly back into the group statue, with well-defined shapes, and holds their balance.

On a signal, each child moves slowly away again, forming an individual statue by themselves with a base of support and a shape that is different from those used for the group statue.

Can you see ...?

- tight muscles
- keeping still – like a statue
- smooth, slow movement
- counterbalance

You could ask ...

What do you need to do to counterbalance?

Variations

Choose a theme and add a movement: Create the shape of an object and carry out the movements of that object (e.g. a washing machine).

Balance Circuit

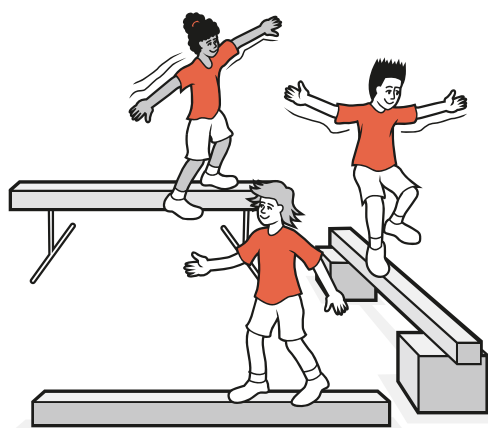
Movement skills/concepts

Dynamic and static balance, space awareness and relationships (with others and equipment).

Set-up

Beams/benches, mats, wobble boards, stilts, Swiss balls, box tops.

Small groups of no more than four, starting at different points of a circuit.



Activity

Children practise the following activities in the circuit.

Beam/bench station: Have three beams/benches at different heights. Children travel along the beam/bench using different locomotor skills (leaps, jumps, walking forwards, backwards, sideways). Then create a sequence (e.g. walk to end, turn, scale balance, walk to centre, do a cat leap, walk to end, do a jump, quarter turn to land).

Balance on less stable objects: Have a wobble board (different heights and bases), stilts and balance (Swiss) ball. Children experiment with different ways of balancing on apparatus, using different body parts (e.g. standing, sitting, kneeling). Can you balance on the apparatus with your eyes closed?

Stationary balances on equipment: Have a selection of box tops. Children create a series of balances, without leaving the surface of the box, transferring from one balance to the next. Then create a sequence of balances on the box that includes: an approach (e.g. run, walk) to the box; a transfer (e.g. jump, step) onto the box; a series of balances on the box; and a dismount (e.g. straddle to land) from the box.

Inverted balances on ground: Try a cartwheel on the ground, on a line (it is like a handstand but sideways). Once their legs are in the air, children bring them together and twist the body so that they land to the left and right – sometimes this is called a round-off. Try a cartwheel with only one hand on the ground.

A floor routine: Have a mat area of approximately 6–10 metres square, space permitting. Children create a sequence that combines stationary balances and travelling movements (e.g. running, galloping, skipping). Include at least three balances, each with: a different base of support; a minimum of three travels, with a change in direction and level; and one inverted balance. Have a beginning and an end shape.

Can you see ...?

- tight muscles
- wide base of support
- slow control when engaging and disengaging
- arms extended for balance (counterbalance)

You could ask ...

How can you safely control engaging and disengaging from a stationary balance?

Partner Support Balances

Movement skills/concepts

Cooperative balances, counterbalance, space and body awareness, and relationships (with others).

Set-up

Mats scattered in a defined area with an even surface.

Children in pairs, matched for height and weight, and with one mat per pair.



Activity

With your partner, children create a balance that has one wide and one narrow shape. Partners need to work together to partially support each other's weight.

Children create different balances with their partner where they are partially supporting each other's weight, then totally supporting each other's weight.

Create a balance where one partner performs an inverted balance.

Can you see ...?

- wide base of support
- extending body parts to counterbalance
- tight muscles

You could ask ...

How can you safely support each other's weight?

Balancing on Hanging Ropes

Movement skills/concepts

Balancing using equipment, body and space awareness.

Set-up

Hanging ropes with mats underneath.

Activity

On a hanging rope, children explore ways of balancing in an upright position.

Can you hang while ...?

- supporting your weight with your hands
- supporting your weight with your hands and legs
- creating some basic shapes (e.g. wide, narrow, curled and twisted with your free body parts)
- creating symmetrical and asymmetrical shapes

Can you see ...

- tight muscles
- tight grip on the rope

You could ask ...

What do you need to do with your body to hold your position on the rope?

Variations

Inverted balance: If children have sufficient upper arm/shoulder strength, try an inverted balance on the hanging rope.

