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## Helping a child with a disability with everyday activities

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### Summary

- If you have a child with a disability, you can help improve their communication and movement by encouraging them to take part in daily activities.
  - Nearly every sound and action your child makes is meaningful – respond to these sounds and actions to encourage communication.
  - Hold your child in a way that will let them develop their own strength and balance – try not to do all the work for them.
  - Encourage your child to stand – this helps build muscle strength.
  - Children learn a lot in the first three years, so it is a good idea to start as early as possible.
  - For more hints and tips for making everyday activities easier, speak with your local doctor, paediatrician or a disability support worker.
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If you have a child with a disability you can help improve their communication and movement if you encourage them to take part in the activities of daily living. Everyday activities like getting dressed and having a bath are great opportunities to encourage your child's development and have fun. Children learn a lot in the first three years, so it is a good idea to start as early as possible.

### Watch and interpret facial expressions

Children often use unique facial expressions, sounds and body language to communicate. For example:

- smiling, frowning or pouting
- babbling, laughing and crying
- turning their head away to mean 'no'
- using their eyes to point to people or objects.

It is therefore important to remember:

- nearly every sound and action your child makes is meaningful.
- all children communicate differently.

### Respond to your child

It can take time and patience to work out what your child is trying to tell you. It will help if you:

- act confidently when you know what they want
- respond to all of your child's sounds and actions
- place yourself face-to-face and level with your child
- imitate any sounds your child makes
- copy any words they say
- keep your sentences short and simple
- make communication fun.

Use bright colours and noisy toys to attract your child's attention. Talk to your child's healthcare professionals about the most suitable physical positions and activities of daily living for your child.

### Hold and carry your child – but let them move

Try to hold your child in a way that will let them develop their own strength and balance and that allows them look

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around. You can:

- hold your child's body against you, but leave their arms and legs free
- make a 'chair' out of your arms for your child to sit in.

### **Make getting dressed easier**

Positions that may make getting your child dressed easier include:

- lying your child on their stomach, side or back
- sitting them on a chair or your lap
- standing them between your legs.

### **Try new positions when nappy changing**

Nappy changing may be difficult if your child's legs are stiff. To help, you can:

- bend their knees to separate their legs
- place a small pillow under their head.

### **Use different sitting and lying positions to build strength**

Sitting and lying in different positions helps develop strength, for example:

- Lying on their side lets a child use their hands and feet.
- Lying on their stomach strengthens back, neck and arm muscles.
- Sitting on the floor with their legs straight stretches leg muscles.
- Sitting on a chair develops upper body strength – make sure their feet are flat on the floor or footrest.

### **Encourage standing and movement**

Regular standing and movement are needed for muscle strength and healthy bones and joints. You can help your child by:

- using a standing frame if your child is unable to stand independently
- placing a favourite toy just out of reach to encourage them to roll, crawl or walk.

### **Support services for children with disabilities**

Early Childhood Intervention Services (ECIS) support children with a disability or developmental delay from birth until they go to school, and their families. Access to ECIS is via the **Department of Education and Training's ECIS Intake Team** in each region of Victoria.

Telephone **1800 783 783** during business hours, ask for early childhood intervention services and the ECIS Intake Team will advise you of the full range of services available in your region.

### **Where to get help**

- Your doctor
- Your paediatrician
- Early Childhood Intervention Services, call **1800 783 783**

**This page has been produced in consultation with and approved by:**

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