



Occupational Therapy Connection

Monthly Newsletter

Working on a Vertical Surface

Working on a vertical surface is one of the best activities children can do to make themselves more successful in many areas. It helps build all those foundational skills required for the all-important task of handwriting. You can also promote these skills by having your child on their belly to play, do work, color, etc.

Core strength - Proximal stability leads to distal mobility. In essence, a student needs strong core muscles to develop fine motor skills. When working on a vertical surface, a child is most likely standing, kneeling, or leaning forward which requires them to activate their trunk for the duration of the task. The longer the tasks, the more strength and endurance they can build.

Shoulder Stability - The next building block one needs after a solid core is shoulder stability. Depending on the activity, vertical surfaces will have kids moving their arms frequently; reaching up, down, out and around. This supports extension of the arm and opportunity for those muscles to strengthen.

Forearm Stabilization and Wrist Extension - Some kids wise up and rest their forearm on the wall/window/easel during vertical work. This is completely okay. It is still strengthening the core and shoulder but now it is training the child to recognize muscular fatigue leading to forearm stabilization. Plus it leads into some awesome wrist extension. When the wrist is extended, the ring and pinky finger tend to naturally find their way into the palm creating a more optimal grasp pattern. A child is going to be able to execute more precise and legible work when using a functional tripod or quadruped grasp.

Spatial Awareness - Working on a vertical surface helps kids make sense of directional terms, specifically up and down because it provides the appropriate context and proper plane for them to comprehend; as opposed to learning it on a worksheet that is completed on a horizontal plane. This is so important for little ones to correctly learn and understand from an early age.

Bilateral Coordination - It forces them to incorporate their other hand as a stabilizer which is something many also struggle to do when working on a horizontal plane. Increased practice with this will help them create an awareness to do it more in all contexts.

Crossing midline - If you have that opportunity, try encouraging them to draw rainbows, figure 8s or “life-size” scenes such as a house or playground that will require them to perform large arm movements that require midline crossing.

Fine Motor Skills - I think it’s clear that working on a vertical surface addresses so many foundational skills that it can naturally and ultimately lead to more success with fine motor skills. With enough repetition, you should observe a noticeable difference in their skills.

FUN AND SIMPLE ACTIVITIES ON A VERTICAL SURFACE:

- Coloring on all surfaces (inside and out) of big boxes
- Fridge magnets
- Magnetic Gears
- Reusable stickers aka window clings on a large sliding glass door
- Stickers on construction paper
- Tracing their hand
- Stencils
- Rubbing plates
- Tactile feedback from textured walls
- Contact paper (taped up with sticky side out to pluck off craft pompom balls)
- Old school Lite Brite
- Glow board positioned vertically
- Using a slant board or three ring binder turned horizontally
- Foam shapes/letters on bathtub wall
- Bath paints or foam (fingers or paint brushes)
- Suction cups
- Window paints/markers
- Squirting/wiping/squeegee-ing windows
- Easels/chalkboards
- Tabletop art easels
- Duplo/Lego wall
- Vertical playground puzzles/games
- Felt boards
- Velcro alphabet or math flashcards
- Chalk on an exterior wall
- Erasing a whiteboard or chalkboard
- Using a sponge to wash the car
- Painting the fence