



In-place movements for infants and toddlers

Infants and toddlers (and preschoolers and adults!) have a difficult time sitting still, waiting for the “next” part of their day. Try these in-place movements to engage young children during transition times. Many of the sitting down movements can be done standing up. The “Other in-place movements” are varied in their level of difficulty and extend to older ages and stages of development. It is helpful (and healthy for the adult’s wellness) to demonstrate these moves alongside the children.

Sitting down movements:

- Slap floors with soles of feet
- Pat, scratch, shake body parts
- Stretch all over
- Wiggle all over (shake your sillies out!)
- Clap body parts together (elbow/knee, feet)
- Clap hands over head, behind back, under legs
- Blink eyes (3x, 5x)
- Spin on buttock using hands
- Clap patterns
- Open-shut fists
- Swing arms

Other in-place movements:

- Jump in place
- Collapse/melt into the ground
- Stomp feet
- On all fours, arch back like a cat stretching, relax
- Run in place and turn in place
- Spin on stomach
- Lie on back, curl into a ball, and roll
- Swing arms together up to one side, other side
- Lie on back and pedal an invisible bike
- Sway back and forth on hands and feet
- Balance on one foot, hold the other
- Balance on knees, one knee
- Make a bridge, belly up
- Supporting yourself with straight arms, be a kicking/bucking horse

Why sit?

Consider: Is there any reason children have to be sitting? Could they “wait” standing up? Even more, could they do these movements while they wait standing up? If you have children who crave physical movement, consider converting traditional seated experiences during the programming day to standing ones. For example, set up a clay sculpting space where the child stands at a waist-high table rather than sitting in a chair to sculpt. Puzzles, sorting games, and table-top block building can also be enjoyed from a standing position rather than from chairs. This invites toddlers who love to move their whole bodies to be physically engaged while playing.

As the adult initiates these in-place movements, add comparison language. “Stomp **BIG, STRONG** DINOSAUR stomps.” “*Tip toe quiet, tiny* chipmunk steps.” Incorporate singing and music into these in-place movements with familiar movement songs like, “Teddy bear, teddy bear, turn around,” “I’m a little teapot,” and “If you’re happy and you know it.”

It is also okay to introduce infants and toddlers to the idea that they can calm and still their own bodies. This calming process may be easier with an adult who guides them by describing what they should do. “Take a deep breath in. Hold. Slowly breath out.” “Rest your arms on your legs. Feel them touch the skin. Notice how still they are....”