

GONGE[®]

INSIGHTS

By physiotherapist Hannah Harboe

Mini Parkour and planning motoric skill activities

Motoric skill planning

When we put together a plan for motoric skills, we draw on our experience and work memories. Good planning requires us having an idea for a single goal, and getting body and senses to help us reach it. Motoric skill planning requires practice and lots of repetition. One example could be a small child who wants to put on their socks. She's seen her parents do it lots of times, and has perhaps realised that the movement requires her hands and arms to pull, while her foot and leg stretch. Using her sensory apparatus, she has to learn how to hold the sock open and how much strength to apply to make the hole big enough. She has to see that all her toes go into the hole, and keep her balance with her entire body sitting on her bottom when lifting one foot up to pull on the sock. A lot can go wrong during the process, making practice and patience necessary.

If planning is not possible, many physical activities become a challenge, and it becomes hard to see where a task starts and where it ends, which can prevent a child from reaching their goal. A child that finds it hard to plan motoric skills can have the diagnosis DCD, which stands for Developmental Coordination Disorder.

Children with problems planning motoric skill development need lots of repetition, and that adults help them to stay on track from start to finish. Working is learning! If we do everything for a child, we're not doing that child any favours.

Parents have to be calm and patient, and the child will have to sit with her socks poised many times before she's as good at putting them on as mummy and daddy.

Mini Parkour

The two main elements of Mini Parkour: the hurdles and bases, can be varied in very many ways. Mini Parkour courses are an invitation and motivation to try out, challenge and complete them. Most children I've met require no instruction before they are out there experimenting with their bodies to complete a Mini Parkour course.

The many variations and immediacy that Mini Parkour appeals to make it perfect for using in motoric skill planning. The child has to make a plan, experiment and maybe even change strategy to find the best way to get from one end (the start) to the other (the finish).



Art 2290
Mini Parkour Starter Set

Case:

Christian is 7 years old. His parents contact me because they've found that he often simply gives up when he encounters challenges in general, but especially those involving motoric skills. He gets upset and says that he's no good at such things. It starts when he gets up, when he has to be helped to get dressed and to pack his school bag. At school, he becomes stressed and upset when the other children switch places, or when he's in other classrooms than the one he's used to.

Christian has trouble remembering things. That's caused him to lose many balaclavas and gloves, but also toys, shoes, coats and so on. He gets easily upset when things disappear. His parents have got into the habit of making sure he gets everything home with him when they pick him up from after-school care.

On the social front, he's popular and has lots of friends, nor does he have any learning problems.

During his motoric skills screening at the clinic, I notice that Christian has a big problem changing strategy. For example: when he fails to hit the target with a ball, he keeps on throwing in exactly the same way, without switching to another and more appropriate strategy. He also finds it hard to remember the programme I devised for him.

His parents were introduced to games and brain exercises designed to boost Christian's working memory. They were later given small, well-defined home exercises focusing on an objective and getting a task done. Christian experienced success and mastery through all the games. We talked about how important it was to give Christian small, everyday tasks to do at home. They could be setting the table, emptying the dishwasher or the like. Tasks that require working memory and motoric skill planning. When a task is completed, it gives satisfaction. Being a key part of the family also builds our resilience. So, even though it may initially require persistence to get a child to help, it's worth the investment.

Christian was presented with a long Mini Parkour course in the clinic. Initially, it's me who challenges Christian, telling him how to tackle the course, such as: "Walk through it without touching the floor; try it with only one foot touching each base; jump through without touching the floor; your hands can only hold the centre of the hurdle," and so on. Christian responded to the challenge. Along the way, I help him with better strategies if he was unable to get any further. My primary focus was to give positive feedback when Christian found good solutions himself to reaching the finish. When he failed, he was told: Yes,

it's hard – you can't do it yet. That little word 'yet' is important to show Christian that he's on his way.

It doesn't take long before Christian silently begins to challenge himself on the course. During the third session, he figures out how to challenge himself to tackle the course backwards, with one foot on each base. It's possible to see from the whole of Christian's body how good it feels for him to find a challenge and set himself a goal. It takes a lot of tries before Christian succeeds in reaching the finishing line, but he keeps trying and finally does it. Christian reacts to finding that we adults can see his persistence, and how we applaud his ideas and ability to keep going until he succeeds.



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