

Farmer Gates

Complex Coordinated Movement

It's a busy day on the farm. Can you help the farmer move the sheep and the cows in and out of the barn?

EQUIPMENT

- Soft toy
- Squeaky toy
- Mirror
- Chair
- Ball
- Music

KEY BENEFITS

- Midline development
- Body awareness
- Coordination
- Laterality

LANGUAGE FOCUS

open, close, left, right

CRITICAL SAFEGUARDS

Ensure the floor is free from hazards when moving around with children.

TEACHING GEMS

- When directing children left and right, have an arrow pointing in the direction you want the children to move toward. When facing children, remember to show the opposite direction to what you call so children see it correctly.
- Help children visualize left and right by marking the sides of the body with different-colored stickers, such as red on the left and blue on the right.
- When children are opening and closing arms and legs together, look out for a motor overflow. Motor overflow is a natural, involuntary occurrence signaling that the midlines



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haven't fully matured and the brain is having difficulty with complex movement patterns. For instance, you may see the mouth mirroring the movement or the tongue sticking out. Or you may see another part of the body moving even when it's not involved in the required activity (such as both shoulders hunching at the same time or the left hand copying what the right hand is doing.) When you see this happening, simplify the activity. Start by isolating independent movements—just the arm or just the foot—until the movement pattern appears fluid, easy, and automatic for the child. Then add a second movement to build up to more complex movement patterns.

ON THE MOVE

Snugglers



MOVEMENT CUES. Feeling what it is like to have different parts of the body move in sync and in opposition helps program baby's brain for complex movement.

GOOD MORNING, FARM! Lay baby on his back. Lean over him and offer him your fingers to grasp. Say, "Good morning, sheep!" Very slowly and gently, bring his arms out to the side, then back to center. Now let's wake up the cows. Place your fingers on baby's ankles and gently push his legs apart and back together. "Good morning, cows!" (R 3–5 times each)

WATCH ME GROW

COWS AND SHEEP ON THE MOVE. Lay baby on his back. Gently move his right hand and left leg out to the side then back to center. Repeat with the other side. (R 3–5 times each)

IN THE KNOW



SHEEP AND COW CROSSING. Lay baby on his back. Gently move his arms out to the side and back to the center, then cross the right hand over the left and return it to center. Repeat, this time crossing the left over the right. Repeat with the legs. (R 3–5 times each)

ON THE MOVE

WATCH ME GROW

IN THE KNOW



Squigglers

ON THE ROAD TO CRAWLING. Putting baby in a position where he can see, feel, and move his arms and legs in different ways prepares him for the more complex movement patterns to come.



DOUBLE DOORS. Stand holding baby against your chest facing out. Stand opposite another adult and baby. Put on some music and tap the babies' toes together. Line up the soles of their feet so they are gently pushing against each other. In that position, swing babies' legs out to the side with their feet still touching and return to center. Try it with 1 leg at a time, too. (R 3–5 times)

CATCH THE STRAY. Sit on the floor with baby between your legs. Open your legs and assist baby to open his. Place a soft toy (a cow if you've got one) between baby's legs. Together, close your legs and baby's, corralling the toy. ("Moo!") Then open the legs and let the cow loose. (R 3–5 times)

SQUEAKY GATE. Sit on the floor with baby between your legs. Place a squeaky toy under your leg. Now open baby's arms to the side and back to center. Squeak the toy with your leg as they close. *Squeak!* Repeat with baby's legs. *Squeak!* Then try the right arm and left leg simultaneously. *Squeak!* Repeat on the other side. (R 3–5 times each)



Scampers

TWO-SIDEDNESS. Exploring movements using 1 or both sides of the body works to develop the brain's full understanding of the body's many dimensions.



THE SPRING IS BROKEN. Sit on the floor with the child between your legs. Hold his hands and slowly open the arms to the side, then quickly spring them back to a clap in the center. Next, keeping the right arm stretched out in front, open only the left arm out to the side and spring back to a clap. Repeat to the right. Then repeat the same pattern with the legs. (R 3–5 times each)

THE LATCH IS BROKEN. Kneel behind baby while you both look into a mirror. Repeat "The Spring Is Broken" game, only this time bring the arms out quickly to the side and slowly back to center. Repeat with the legs. (R 3–5 times each)

HIGH GATES. Sit in a chair and stand the child on your feet, supporting him carefully around the waist. Open and close your legs slowly so his open and close with yours. Now open just your right leg to the side. Then the left. (R 3–5 times)



ON THE MOVE

WATCH ME GROW

IN THE KNOW



Stompers

LEFT AND RIGHT. Children learn to establish an understanding of left and right when they move their body and hear the language of direction at the same time.

CATCH THE STRAY 2. Sit the child facing you on the floor with each of your legs in the open position. Roll a ball toward him and encourage him to catch it with his legs. Work with him to trap the ball by closing his legs around it. (D 3–5 min.)

SHEEPDOGGING. Have the child stand opposite you. Tell him he's a sheepdog, and it's his job to catch the sheep (the ball). Roll a ball along the ground and encourage him to stop it any way he can. As he gains confidence with the game, have him try to stop the sheep with his feet, hands, knees, elbows, and so forth. (D 3–5 min.)



SLEEPY GATES. Have the child lie on his back on the floor. Explain that his arms and legs are like gates that can open and close. Kneel behind his head and explain that the object is to open and close whichever gate you call out and tap. Have him move both arms out to the side and back down (imagine the arms of a snow angel). Repeat with the legs. Then do both at the same time. Next, have him open just the right gates (right arm and right leg). Then the left. Be sure to give the child both a verbal and physical cue throughout the play. Do this activity slowly and quietly so he has time to absorb the sensations of isolated movement. (D 3–5 min.)



Scooters

COORDINATED TEAMWORK. Working with others challenges children to coordinate their movements in dynamic context with others.

WHICH GATE? Have the child lie on his back on the floor. Kneel behind his head and explain that the object is to open and close whichever gate you tap. Start with 1 gate at a time and create random combinations, then try 2 gates at once. Now try it sitting up, which gives the brain an experience of a different orientation for these complex movements. Pair up children, having 1 child play the role of the tapper. Switch roles after a few minutes. (D 2–3 min.)

THROUGH THE GATES. Turn on some upbeat music. Have 2 children form a gate-way by joining hands above their heads. The others form a line and go through the gates. As the line leader goes through the gates he joins up with the end of the line to keep the game going. Whenever the music stops, the gates close (arms drop to waist level), and the next 2 children in line become the gatekeepers. For more fun, have the children move in different ways through the gates (hop, jump, heel-to-toe walk). (D 2–3 min.)



THE REALLY BIG GATE. Have children hold hands and form 2 lines facing each other. Tell the children at one end to reach across and hold hands as well. (They are the gate's hinge!) On your cue, the children step backward to create a single, straight line (an open gate). Now reverse the process and close our really big gate, with the 2 children standing firm as the hinge. (R 3–5 times)



Skedaddlers

When the midlines have been fully established and the concept of left and right is internalized, moving in a well-coordinated manner becomes easier and easier.

MOO AND BAA. Have children sit on the floor with their arms out in front of them. Tell them that their arms are the sheep gates and their legs are the cow gates. When you say, "Moo," children open both cow gates and keep them open until you moo again. When you say, "Baa," they open both sheep gates and keep them open until you baa again). (D 2–3 min.)

QUACK GATES. Repeat the "Moo and Baa" game to warm up. Then explain that a duck has come into the barnyard, and things are now going every which way! Each time you quack, the children must close and open their gates at the same time. (For instance, open the cow gates while closing the sheep gates.) Have them stop and hold that position (legs open, arms closed) for a few moments, then reverse the simultaneous movement—cow gates (legs) closing as sheep gates (arms) are opening. Work up to a pace at which children can do this fluidly. (D 3–5 min.)



ALL MIXED UP. Repeat "Moo and Baa" and "Quack Gates" as warm-ups, with legs as cow gates and arms as sheep gates. Then, explain that the cows and sheep are all mixed together in the same field, and children need to move them. First, have children open and close the left sheep gate and the right cow gate simultaneously. Then do the reverse, opening and closing the right sheep gate and left cow gate. Now really mix it up. Have children keep the right sheep gate open while they open the left cow gate and close the left sheep gate. Continue, having fun with all the possible combinations! (D 3–5 min.)