

Bilateral skills and crossing the mid-line

Most children, by the time they are three or four years old, have mastered the bilateral skill (using both sides of the body together) called “crossing the midline”.

This is the ability to move one hand, foot, or eye into the space of the other hand, foot or eye. Crossing the mid-line of your body helps build pathways in the brain and is an essential skill for children to develop good motor and cognitive skills.

Children who have difficulty crossing the body’s mid-line often have trouble with skills such as reading, writing, completing self-care skills and taking part in physical activities.

The right and left-hand hemispheres of the brain both control different functions and tasks; it is vital for both sides to communicate with each other to coordinate development.



Children usually develop the ability to use both sides of their body for a task around the ages of three or four years. Crossing the midline is essential to develop reading and writing skills, as well as sports and other everyday activities. Without this skill, children may experience frustration due to a lack of motor control and poor coordination.

To help develop the efficient crossing of the mid-line, provide children with a variety of two-handed (bilateral) play activities:

- Encourage children to touch the opposite elbow and knee with their hand
- Get children to hold their nose, then cross the other hand over and touch their opposite ear (repeat with opposite side)
- Encourage children to scoop sand from one side of the body and put it into a bucket on the opposite side of the body without switching hands
- Encourage children to blow bubbles and reach across to pop them on opposite sides
- Throw coloured scarves in the air and reach to catch them on the opposite side
- Reach for objects whilst lying on the tummy e.g. a small ball or bean bag.