

BODY AWARENESS

What is this developmental skill?

Body awareness, also called proprioception, is the ability to know where the body's parts are and how they are moving without having to look at them. It allows children to judge how much force to use, coordinate movements, maintain posture, and move confidently through their environment. Good body awareness helps children climb stairs, catch a ball, sit in a chair, write with appropriate pressure, and play safely with others.

How does this normally develop?

Body awareness develops through active movement and physical interaction with the environment. Babies kick, roll, crawl, climb, and push against caregivers and objects. As children grow, running, jumping, rough-and-tumble play, carrying objects, and playground activities continually strengthen the brain's understanding of the body's position and movement. Repeated movement experiences refine these neural pathways throughout childhood.

How can neglect interfere with its development?

Children experiencing neglect often have fewer opportunities for active play, safe exploration, and responsive caregiving. Limited movement experiences reduce opportunities for the brain to develop accurate body awareness. Chronic stress may also interfere with the brain's ability to integrate proprioceptive information, leaving children feeling disconnected from their bodies or constantly seeking intense physical input.

What might this look like?

A child with poor body awareness may:

- Frequently bump into people or furniture.
- Use too much or too little force.
- Appear clumsy or awkward.
- Break toys unintentionally.
- Have messy handwriting or difficulty manipulating objects.
- Seek crashing, pushing, or rough play.
- Struggle with sports or coordinated movement.

These behaviors often reflect differences in sensory processing rather than intentional carelessness.

Parenting Implications

Caregivers can support body awareness by providing frequent opportunities for movement and "heavy work," such as climbing, pushing, pulling, carrying groceries, helping with chores, playground activities, obstacle courses, or animal walks. Rather than repeatedly telling children to "be careful," adults can create experiences that strengthen the body's internal feedback systems.

From Understanding to Attunement

Instead of seeing a child as clumsy or reckless, caregivers can recognize that the child's brain may simply need more accurate information about where the body is in space. Meeting that sensory need builds confidence, coordination, and self-regulation over time.