



Rough and Tumble Activities

Rough and tumble play is not just fun.
It's fundamental brain development
that must happen before children can
successfully engage in academic
learning.

When we rush children into academics
without this crucial foundation, we're
building a house without a foundation.



The Science Behind Rough and Tumble Play



Vestibular System Development:

The inner ear system that controls balance and spatial orientation is developed through spinning, rolling, and tumbling movements. This system must be mature before children can sit still, focus their eyes on text, or coordinate fine motor movements for writing.

Proprioceptive Awareness:

Through rough play, children learn where their body is in space. This body awareness is essential for sitting in a chair, holding a pencil correctly, and maintaining attention during seated activities.

Important Notice for Educators:



These rough and tumble play activities are provided as educational resources and require professional judgment in implementation. As qualified early childhood educators, you are expected to:

- Assess individual children's developmental readiness before introducing any activity
- Modify activities based on children's physical abilities, emotional needs, and comfort levels
- Ensure appropriate supervision ratios and maintain constant vigilance during physical play
- Follow your centre's policies regarding physical contact and rough play activities

Important Notice for Educators:



- Stop activities immediately if any child shows signs of distress, overstimulation, or discomfort
- Adapt activities for children with additional needs, medical conditions, etc.
- Use your professional training to determine which activities are appropriate for your specific group and setting

The authors assume no liability for injuries or incidents that may occur during these activities. Professional discretion, proper training, and adherence to safety protocols are essential. If you are unsure about implementing any activity, consult with your supervisor, seek additional training, or modify the activity to ensure safety.

The Science Behind Rough and Tumble Play



Attention and Focus:

Children who engage in adequate rough and tumble play develop better attention spans and can sit still for longer periods. The movement satisfies their sensory needs, allowing them to focus when it's time for quieter activities.

Emotional Regulation:

Physical play helps children process emotions, reduce stress hormones, and develop self-control. A child who has had adequate movement is better able to regulate their emotions during challenging academic tasks.

What Happens When We Skip This Foundation



When children are pushed into academics without sufficient physical play:

- Attention difficulties increase
- Fine motor skills remain underdeveloped
- Emotional meltdowns become more frequent
- Learning becomes associated with stress rather than joy
- Physical coordination suffers
- Social skills lag behind academic expectations

The Academic Benefits of Rough and Tumble Play



Reading Readiness:

Rolling, spinning, and tumbling develop the vestibular system needed for smooth eye tracking across a page.

Writing Preparation:

Crawling, pushing, and pulling build the shoulder stability and core strength needed for fine motor control.

Math Concepts:

Physical play teaches spatial relationships, patterns, and sequencing that are fundamental to mathematical thinking.

Problem-Solving:

Navigating physical challenges builds the same neural pathways used for solving academic problems.

GENTLE HAND PUSHING ON MATS

Setup:

Large soft mats, children sitting facing each other

Option 1:

Two children sit facing each other and gently push hands together

Option 2:

Child and adult sit facing each other for gentle hand pushing game

Let them control the pressure – some prefer gentle pushes, others more resistance



Benefits:

Builds core strength and body awareness

PILLOW MOUNTAIN CLIMBING

Setup:

Large pile of soft pillows and cushions

Option 1:

Climb over pillow mountain to reach the other side

Option 2:

Dive into pillow pile and burrow through to bottom

Follow their climbing style – some will be cautious, others adventurous



Benefits:

Develops gross motor planning and spatial awareness

CAT CRAWL RACES

Setup:

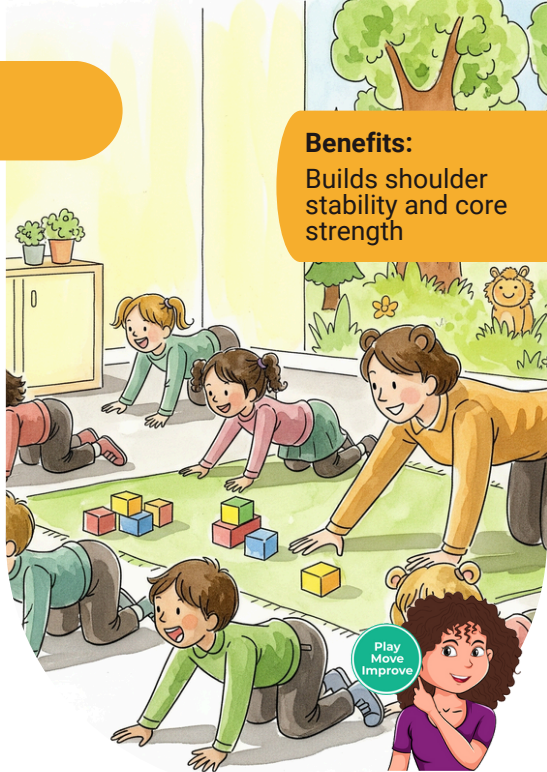
Soft ground surface, clear pathway

Option 1:

Crawl on hands and knees like cats across yard

Option 2:

Adult crawls alongside child to model smooth and controlled crawling action



Benefits:

Builds shoulder stability and core strength

LOG ROLLING FUN

Setup:

Large foam logs or pool noodles, soft surface

Option 1:

Lie on log and rock back and forth gently

Option 2:

Roll log with whole body while lying across it

Trust their comfort level – some love rolling, others prefer rocking

Benefits:

Develops vestibular system and balance



SANDWICH SQUISHING GAME

Setup:

Large soft cushions or exercise ball

Option 1:

Child lies between cushions and gets gentle "squished"

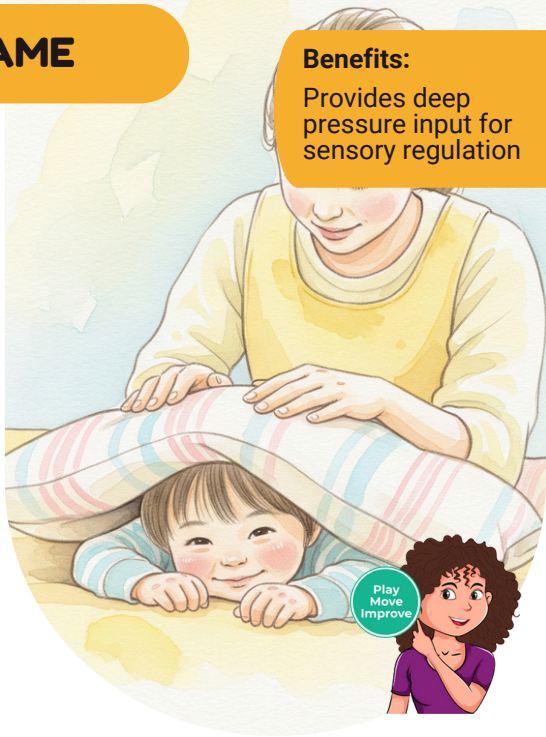
Option 2:

Roll exercise ball gently over child lying on mat

Let them request more or less pressure – sensory needs vary greatly

Benefits:

Provides deep pressure input for sensory regulation



Play
Move
Improve



GENTLE BODY BOWLING

Setup:

Large soft balls, child as "bowling pin," soft mats

Option 1:

Roll large ball toward child who tries to stay standing

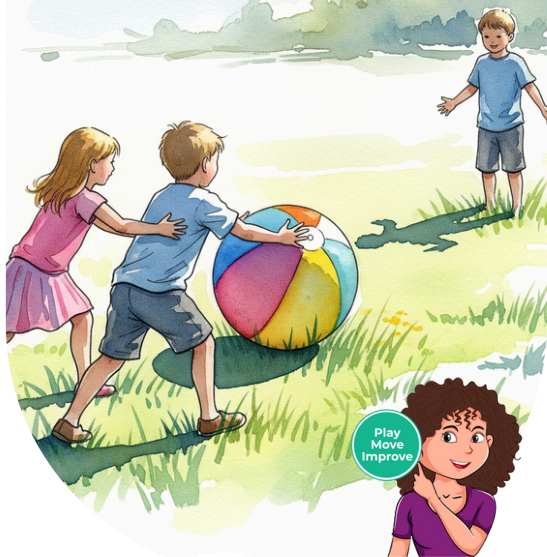
Option 2:

Child rolls ball and then gets knocked down by it gently

Keep it playful – falling down should be the fun part

Benefits:

Improves reaction time and balance responses



WHEELBARROW WALKING

Setup:

Soft grass area, adult to support legs

Option 1:

Child walks on hands while adult holds ankles briefly

Option 2:

Practice supporting weight on hands in preparation

Go slow and short distances – this is challenging for young children

Benefits:

Strengthens arms and improves body awareness



BLANKET DRAGGING RIDES

Setup:

Strong blanket, smooth and soft surface, adult to pull

Option 1:

Child sits on blanket while adult pulls them from cone to cone (if safe to do so and educator doesn't have any injuries)

Have a set time (1 minute), or set zone (cone to cone) so the adult can have regular breaks, as we don't want any injuries for the educator

Benefits:

Provides vestibular input and spatial awareness



Play
Move
Improve



SOCK PULLING FUN

Setup:

Soft socks, sitting position on mats

Option 1:

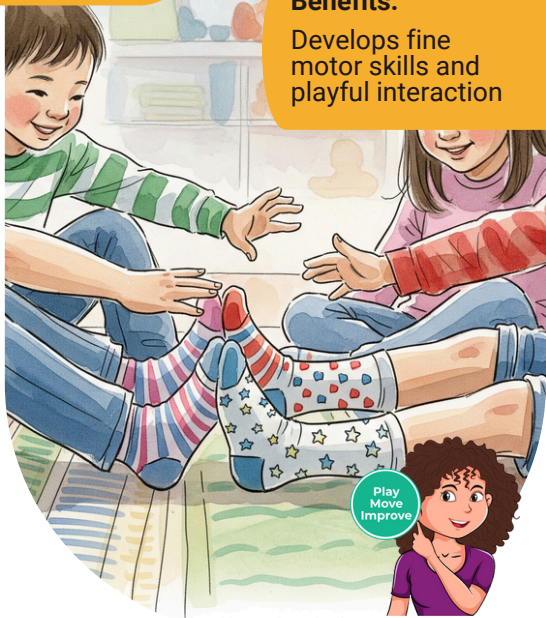
Try to pull socks off each other's feet while sitting (make it fun, rather than too competitive)

Option 2:

Adult helps child pull off adult's socks in silly game - or use 'kindergarten socks' rather than child's own socks so no child's sock is damaged during the activity

Benefits:

Develops fine motor skills and playful interaction



HUMAN KNOT UNTANGLING

Setup:

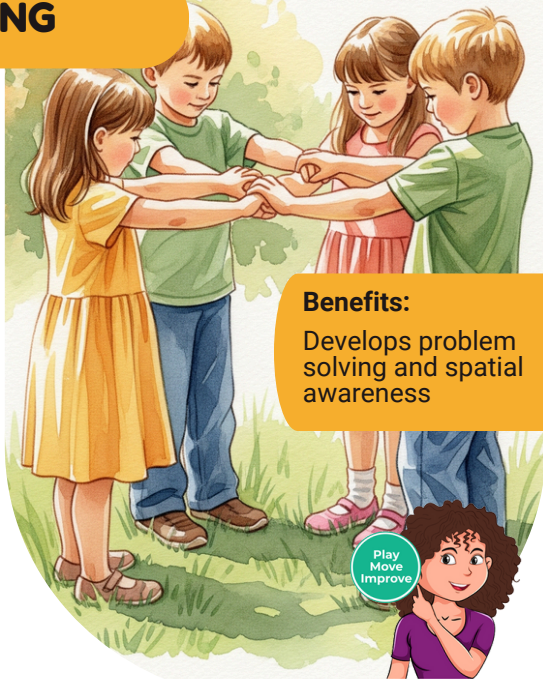
Small group of 3-4 children, soft surface

Option 1:

Children hold hands and gently twist into knot, then work together to untangle

Adult helps guide children through making and solving human knot

Keep groups small – too many children makes untangling frustrating



Benefits:

Develops problem solving and spatial awareness

GENTLE KING OF THE MOUNTAIN

Setup:

Pile of soft pillows or cushions, safety rules established

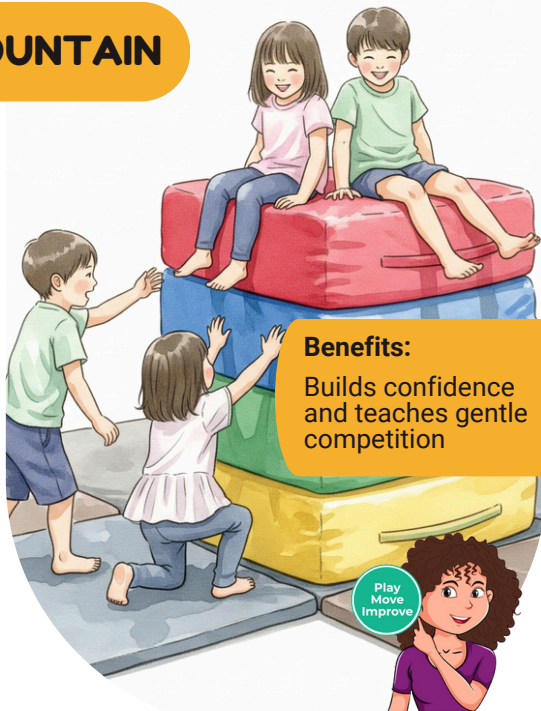
Option 1:

One child sits on pillow mountain while others try to gently pull them down

Option 2:

Multiple children climb pillow mountain together, helping each other up

Emphasise gentleness – pulling should be more like helping than forcing



Benefits:

Builds confidence and teaches gentle competition

PARACHUTE POPCORN PLAY

Setup:

Large parachute, soft foam balls or bean bags

Option 1:

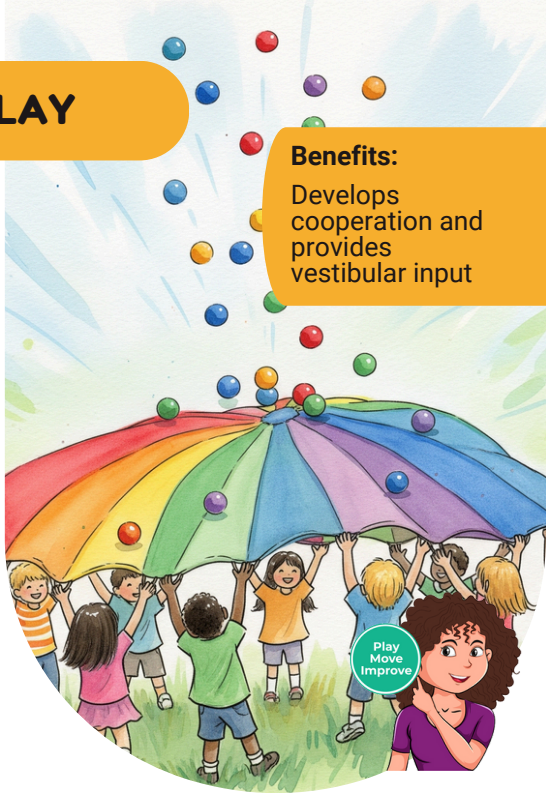
Children hold parachute edges while adult places balls on top to bounce

Option 2:

Children crawl under bouncing parachute while balls "pop" above

Benefits:

Develops cooperation and provides vestibular input



GENTLE SITTING WRESTLING

Setup:

Large soft mat, sitting position only

Option 1:

Two children sit cross-legged and try to gently tug each other off balance

Keep it playful - focus on giggles rather than winning

Benefits:

Builds core stability and balance responses



GENTLE BULLDOZER PUSH

Setup:

Large cardboard boxes, outdoor area, children as "bulldozers"

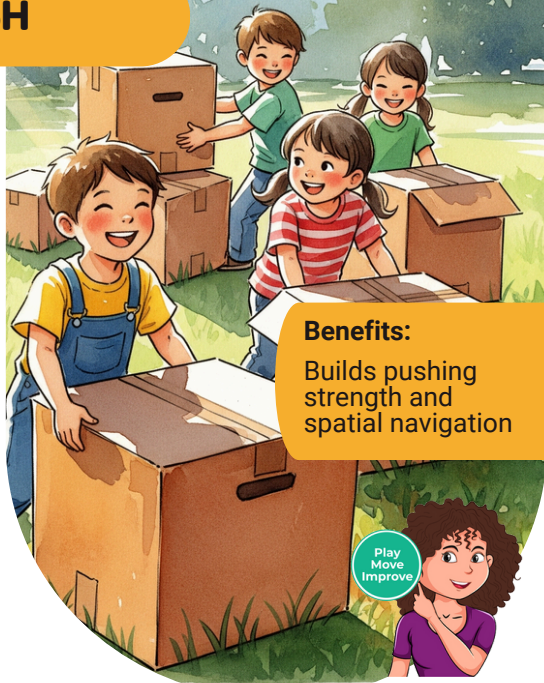
Option 1:

Children push empty boxes around yard like bulldozers

Option 2:

Add small weight to the boxes (less than 2 kilograms) using toys, books, etc.

Monitor speed – bulldozers should move slowly and safely



Benefits:

Builds pushing strength and spatial navigation

Play
Move
Improve

STARFISH CRASH LANDING

Setup:

Extra-thick crash mat (at least 6 inches), clear running path, adult supervision

Option 1:

Children take turns running and jumping onto crash mat, landing like starfish with arms and legs spread wide

Monitor approach speed - excitement can lead to unsafe running

Benefits:

Builds confidence and provides proprioceptive input



SUPERMAN FLYING CRASH

Setup:

Extra-thick crash mat (at least 6 inches), low platform or step (2-6 inches high)

Option 1:

Children jump from low step and crash carefully onto the extra-thick crash mat (feet first, or 'superman', star fish style (tummy first) - not head first)

Ensure mat is positioned to catch full body length



Benefits:

Builds confidence and provides proprioception & vestibular input



ROPE BRIDGE CROSSING

Setup:

Thick rope on ground, 3-4 children, balance challenge

Option 1:

Children hold hands and walk across rope "bridge" together without falling off

Celebrate helping each other more than perfect balance



Benefits:

Develops balance and cooperation

BLANKET SEESAW FUN

Setup:

Large strong blanket, 2 children on each end

Option 1:

Children sit on blanket ends and gently pull back and forth

Monitor pulling force – should be gentle and smooth rocking motion



Benefits:

Builds coordination and trust between partners

RING AROUND THE ROSIE

Setup:

Open soft area, group of 3-6 children

Option 1:

Children hold hands in circle, sing song, and fall down together at the end

Option 2:

Add variations like spinning before falling or crawling around in circle

Let them fall onto soft area – the tumbling is the most enjoyable/beneficial part

Benefits:

Develops coordination, rhythm, and group cooperation

