

Handy Handouts®

Free informational handouts for educators, parents, and students

Cross That Line! (Midline, That Is!)

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Have you ever heard the expression, “You’re crossing the line!” It usually means that someone is starting to behave in an undesirable way, and it’s a line you typically don’t want to cross. But there is a line that should be crossed. That line is called “midline.” “Midline” is an imaginary line that separates the right side of your body from the left. It runs down the center of your body from the top of your head, all the way to the ground between your left foot and right foot. When you “cross midline,” you move one part of your body (such as an arm or leg) across that imaginary line to the other side of your body.

Is Crossing Midline Important?

Crossing midline is a critical part of getting the two sides of your body to work together to complete a task. You must be able to cross midline in order to scratch your elbow, put your shoes on, catch a ball, and write across a page without switching hands. Children who have difficulty crossing midline often seem to have less-developed fine motor skills, poor hand-eye coordination, and difficulty with gross motor activities. Difficulty crossing midline isn’t limited to just your arms and legs though; It can even affect your eyes! If you have difficulty tracking across midline with your eyes, you can have difficulty reading from left to right across a page.

Activities to Promote Crossing the Midline

Crossing midline comes naturally to most children. It’s not a skill that we often need to teach. In fact, children should demonstrate the ability to cross midline by the age of 3-4 years. If your child is struggling with crossing midline, here are a few ideas you can use to help him/her develop this important skill:



- **Practice during snack time.**

Spread pieces of cereal, carrots, or other snack food across your child’s eating area. Urge him/her to reach all of the pieces of food with only one hand.



- **Pop bubbles.**

Give your child something to hold in one hand so he/she has to use the other hand to pop the bubbles. Blow bubbles on the right and left sides of your child to encourage him/her to cross midline to reach the bubbles.



- **Drive a toy car.**

Create a “track” on a table using paper, cards, or blocks. Encourage your child to drive a toy car along the track using just one of his/her hands. Then have him/her switch the toy car to the other hand and drive the car back to its starting position.



- **Play ball.**

Throwing, catching, or kicking a playground ball is a great way to practice crossing midline. Throw or roll a ball to your child’s left side, then throw or roll a ball to his/her right side for added practice.

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- **Exercise.** Do exercises with your child such as “Windmills” that require him/her to reach across midline. To do windmills, stand with your feet shoulder-width apart and arms stretched out to the side. Bend and turn at the waist, touching your right fingers to your left toes. Stand up straight and repeat in the other direction, touching your left fingers to your right toes.



- **Grapevine Walk.** Have your child stand with his/her feet together. Next, have him/her use the left foot to step across in front of the right. Then move the right foot back beside the left. Continue for 8-10 steps, then have your child go back in the opposite direction, using the right foot to step across in front of the left.

While crossing midline is not a skill that we often think about, it is an important foundation for so many other skills that are critical for a child’s growth and development. If you think your child may have difficulties with crossing midline or other fine motor skills, do not hesitate to ask your child’s physician for information regarding occupational therapy services. If your child is in school, you can discuss your concerns with his/her teacher. Finally, you can visit the American Occupational Therapy Association’s website (www.aota.org) for a list of occupational therapists in your area. For additional information related to fine motor skills and occupational therapy, see [Handy Handouts #121 “Help Your Preschool Child Develop Fine Motor Skills,”](#) [#145 “Fine Motor Milestones,”](#) and [#165 “What Is An Occupational Therapist?”](#)



Resources:

- “Crossing the Midline,” accessed May 22, 2019, <http://therapystreetforkids.com/CrossingMidline.html>
- “Crossing Midline: The Imaginary Line Between Right and Left,” accessed May 22, 2019, <https://ptcne.org/crossing-midline-the-imaginary-line-between-right-and-left/>
- “Help Your Child Develop the “Crossing the Midline” Skill,” accessed May 22, 2019, <https://nspt4kids.com/parenting/help-your-child-develop-the-crossing-the-midline-skill/>

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