



## HELPING YOUR CHILD DEVELOP NEW MOTOR SKILLS

### USING THE CO-OP APPROACH

PRACTICE! PRACTICE! PRACTICE! – Your child has thrown the ball, knotted his laces, or stood straddling his bike over and over and over again and not moved any closer to being able to do these typical activities of childhood. The practice he has been doing may have only reinforced making the same mistakes again and again. The problem may not be that he does not have the skills to do the activity – it may be that he does not have the right PLAN.

CO-OP is an approach used with children who are struggling to learn new motor skills. It helps them **THINK** their way to success in being able to do the activities they want or need to be able to do.

**GOAL – PLAN – DO – CHECK** is a strategy your child can use any time he comes up against a challenge in doing an activity. This strategy encourages him to think about what he is going to do and how he is going to do it before just jumping in and doing it.

- **Goal** – What do I want to be able to do?
- **Plan** – How am I going to get my goal done? What are the steps?
- **Do** – Just do it – try the activity.
- **Check** – Did my plan work? Did I get to my goal?

You can help your child use this strategy by following a few simple guidelines:

- **One thing at a time!** Don't try to fix everything at once. Try to figure out which one part of the skill is causing the biggest breakdown in his being able to do the activity. Once he is able to do this part, move on to the next part. For example, if he is learning to bike, you may notice that he has difficulty with balance because he is pedaling too slow, he is unable to turn, and he cannot get himself started. You may decide to start with getting him to pedal faster because that will make it easier to stay upright on the bike. Once he is able to do this well, then you may want to work on him turning or getting started.
- **Ask, don't tell!** Despite your best intentions to help, your child may interpret your repeated telling him what to do as nagging. If you ask the right question, you will guide him to discover the solution himself!

For example, with biking, after you demonstrate going slow and then

going fast while pedaling, ask him which way he thinks made you less wobbly.

- **Coach, don't adjust!** This is the physical partner to "Ask, don't tell". Your "helpfulness" in pushing his chair in closer to his desk or holding his paper still won't be much good when you aren't there. For example, with the biking, try to avoid the typical parental "hand on the back of the bike seat" position as much as possible. By working on one small step at a time, this should be able to be avoided.
- **Make it obvious!** Children with motor coordination difficulties don't learn easily from just watching. They have difficulty figuring out which part of the skill is causing them the biggest problem. Without telling him, try to make it obvious to him what he should be paying attention to. Make obvious mistakes when modeling. For example, in the biking example, when modeling the two different speeds of biking for him, exaggerate your wobbliness when biking very slow.
- **Make it fun!** Try to use this approach to help your child reach goals that **HE** has chosen. It is not an easy process to struggle to learn something new – if the motivation is there, it is much easier to continue. Once he has experienced success learning activities that he wants to learn, then try using the same approach with other activities that you may be more concerned with (e.g., printing).
- **Promote learning!** There are lots of different ways to help a child learn. Try to use a variety of methods such as positive reinforcement, modeling, providing prompts or cues.
- **Work towards independence!** The ultimate goal of this approach is that the child can use these strategies on his own when he finds himself challenged by an activity that he wants or needs to be able to do. Gradually reduce the amount of support you give him.
- **Promote generalization and transfer!** When your child successfully uses a strategy, ask him when else he might be able to use the same strategy to do something. For example, if he learns that it is easier to eat from a bowl if he holds the bowl still with one hand, ask him when else it might be helpful if he uses one hand to hold something still (e.g., the paper when printing). Cue him to remember GOAL – PLAN – DO – CHECK when he faces another challenging activity.

Video example - Max has a goal of being able to skip rope 17 times:

[http://elearningcanchild.ca/dcd\\_pt\\_workshop/evidence-based-practice/some-approaches-better.html](http://elearningcanchild.ca/dcd_pt_workshop/evidence-based-practice/some-approaches-better.html)

Adapted from "The Cognitive Orientation to daily Occupational Performance (CO-OP) Approach" (H. Polatajko, A. Mandich, 2004).

