

Walking On a Balance Beam

Children love to walk on balance beams, and they are going to try it with or without adult help. The world is a balance beam for young children. Parents know that a simple walk down the street with their child may turn into an Olympic challenge as the child balances on street curbs and brick walls. Anywhere they go children are always looking for something to walk across.



The Skill

Being on balance means having an even distribution of weight on each side of a vertical axis. The center of gravity is over the base of support. For young children, being on balance simply means not falling over. Walking on a beam is considered dynamic balance—being on balance while moving.

Cues

A cue word or phrase is like a movement secret that helps your child learn or perform a skill better. Cues help children focus on one specific part of a complex skill. The best cues to use for helping your child develop balance while walking on a beam is to extend the arms to the side and to not look down. Many children will look at their feet while walking on the beam and lose their balance. Always look forward.

The cue for development of skill in walking on a beam:

- Extend arms to the side
- Look straight ahead, not down

Equipment



Introduce children to walking on balance beams placed only slightly above floor level. Children should gain skill and confidence before moving to higher beams. A beam no more than 6-8 inches off the ground is recommended. This is a height from which a child can easily jump or step down from if they lose their balance.

Activity

In this activity we will pretend to walk the circus tightrope. Give your child the opportunity to practice balancing on the beam emphasizing holding his/her arms out to the side.

What Should Parents Do?

- To begin simple ask your child to walk across and balance on a line on the ground. As skill develops on the ground move to a beam.



- Ask your child to step up onto one end of the beam and walk (not slide the feet) across it just as they would walk across the room. “Step with one foot and then step with the other foot.”
- You may need to hold your child’s hand the first couple of times to provide confidence. Stand beside your child, and not in front, while holding one hand. Standing in front or behind your child may throw him/her off balance.
- It helps children balance while walking across a beam to hold their arms straight out at their sides. “What do you do with your arms when you walk of a beam? That’s correct; you hold your arms out like airplane wings.”
- Walking backward on the beam requires children to also pick up their feet and step. Although tempting to do so, suggest that your child walk backward and not slide her feet. Remember, arms to the side.



Assessment Ideas

The National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE, 2004) has developed benchmarks in this area that suggest that by the time a child completes kindergarten he/she should be able to demonstrate control in balancing activities on a variety of objects (including balance beams).

Checklist (place date when observed)

| | Not Yet | Emerging | Consistently |
|--|---------|----------|--------------|
| Walk forward on a balance beam with arms to the side | | | |
| Walk backward forward on a balance beam with arms to the side | | | |