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Balance in CrossFit Kids

Balance is another of the general physical skills developed through practice which leads to changes in the nervous system. Balance describes the "ability to control the placement of the body's center of gravity in relation to its support" (Glassman). Balance is a physiological mechanism that is regulated by the vestibular system within the ear. Anyone who has had an inner ear infection can attest to the necessity of balance. Navigating life with a compromised equilibrium is an uncomfortable and, even, dangerous endeavor. There is no movement without balance, other than that which leads to a face firmly planted on the floor. This is even more pronounced when we begin to add the complex movements of exercise and sport to our routines. By improving balance in the most strenuous of situations, we render the average movement as safe as sedentary.

CrossFit Kids workouts address the development of balance in a number of ways. One primary contribution is the CrossFit commitment to midline stabilization. This is in contrast to the faddish isolation "core" work being promoted in gyms and magazines across America. Midline stabilization refers to the ability of the torso to function from a position of stability and strength without compromising correct posture, form or function which requires the collective and cooperative functioning of the entire torso including, but not limited to, the abdominals. "The key to midline stabilization is understanding how to use your muscles and connective tissue to hold your spine, hips and head inline irrespective of your body orientation, standing, squatting, pulling or pushing" (Okumu). Midline stabilization is paramount to achieving stability and fluidity in movement and an increased ability to maintain good posture. This is a necessity in daily life and of immeasurable value in the face of increased physical challenges. Balance is also improved through an emphasis on appropriate form which creates the need for kids to properly

place their bodies in order to achieve the best movement. In a nutshell, if a child does not have a good center of gravity, form will inevitably break down as the child loses balance. We often see this as rocking to and fro, traveling hands attempting to regain center, and heels leaving the ground. Since all movement requires balance, every aspect of a CrossFit workout addresses this issue. Squats, box jumps, wall ball, D-ball, broad jumps, running-the need for balance in each of these is readily apparent. Unique activities that have allowed our kids to practice and improve balance include walking across a low beam, work on the climbing wall and even slacklining.

Balance training, like coordination, frequently relies on gymnastics movements. Once again drawing on the pushup example, a child who lacks balance will struggle with the plank position. He may drop to the knees or move the butt up or down in an attempt to achieve the center of gravity necessary to remain on his hands and toes. Additionally, we may see the same child fall to the floor at the bottom position, not from a lack of strength, but due to the inability to maintain balance. A similar example would be the handstand pushup. From its inception (placement of the hands on the ground) to its apex (a successful return to the top position), handstand pushups require constant monitoring and appropriate adjustments regarding one's position in space.

Olympic and power lifts rely heavily on balance while, at the same time, facilitating substantial gains in its acquisition. While a failed lift may occur for a myriad of reasons, lack of balance is always a primary suspect. Stepping forward or back, shifting the center of mass by leaning or arching, and bar drift are examples of ways in which a lifter may compensate for lack of balance. Form and midline stabilization are paramount in lifting, not only in order to successfully complete the lift but as a necessity to safety. citations: Coach Greg Glassman, Franklin Okumu (CrossFit Oakland)

Balance 101 for Kids

Your sense of balance refers to your ability to maintain your position in space. Balance is what allowed you to take your first step without falling when you were a toddler. It is what helps you run across the room or jump over a rock and land on your feet. Without balance, you would be in constant danger of tipping over, falling down and/or face-planting. Balance is controlled by

your inner ear, which explains why you sometimes feel dizzy and like you might fall over when you have a head cold. You can improve your balance with any number of CrossFit exercises. Some complex activities include one-legged squats and handstand pushups. Try standing on one foot for time. Make it harder by closing your eyes or tilting your head back. But it doesn't have to be that difficult. Even the most basic movements lead to gains in balance. Every time you complete a WOD, you can be sure you have used and improved your sense of balance.

Beautiful Balance - Spiderman