

Gross Motor Play with a Purpose

6 - 9

MONTHS



Starfish Therapies

Welcome



At Starfish our favorite part of what we do is helping our kids find opportunities for fun AND work. Play is, after all, their job! We hope that our passion has connected with you in our [first](#) and [second](#) volumes. At 6 months your baby's movements are progressing quickly and becoming more bold and explorative. Read on for ways to encourage your baby's inner explorer!

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Tools and Toys

- Stacking Cups
- Cause and Effect Toys (i.e. musical or sound, spinner, popper)
- Large piece puzzles
- [Toys of various heights](#)
- Activity Tables

Check out our [Amazon store](#) for our favorites options!



Creating Opportunities with Toys

One of our biggest educational points with our families is the importance of creating opportunities. Sure, sometimes kids will march along the developmental milestone path all the way to independence regardless of additional guidance or support. But more often than many might think, they get stalled or become satisfied at one stop and their drive to try new movements becomes minimal. Even if your child is self-propelled along this path to independence, there is never any harm in providing more opportunity!

Based on the developmental stage of 6-9 month old babies, a huge component to creating these opportunities is height. And what is one of the key motivators right now? Toys! Present them with toys that are short, tall, or have components both high and low. Place toys on benches or steps, on cushions or tables or chair seats, or use vertical surfaces like windows and mirrors. Encourage them to play with these heights in kneeling, standing, bending and twisting. Even if your baby isn't ready or able to do it on their own yet, help facilitate it. We've said this before and we will repeat it many times as you continue to read our materials: move (or help move) the baby to the toy rather than the toy to the baby. Apply this principle across the board and you should be off to the races!

Key Terms



Tall Kneel:



Bottom up off knees

Half Kneel:



One knee elevated

Quadruped:



Hands and Knees

Prone extension (aka prone press up): Baby is lying on their belly holding their upper body elevated off the ground on fully straight (extended) arms. A precursor to quadruped and crawling!

Tall Kneel: Baby is kneeling with their bottom elevated off their heels. "Short kneel" is when their bottom rests on their heels.

Half Kneel: Baby is positioned with one knee down and the other elevated with the foot planted. This is often seen when they use it as a transitional position for pulling to stand!

Quadruped: Position with baby on hands and knees, belly elevated off the floor.

Commando Crawl (aka belly crawl, aka army crawl): Usually precedes what is typically thought of as crawling in which baby propels themselves across the floor by pulling with arms/pushing with legs but belly remains on the ground.

Crawling: When baby progresses across the floor in the quadruped position advancing their hands and feet in a reciprocal pattern.

Scooting: a normal part of motor development in which baby scoots on their bottom to pivot in place or to approach something close by. Some kids can utilize this as a replacement for crawling – check out [page 22](#)!



For more milestone terms check out our [developmental round up](#) post!

The Professional Sitter

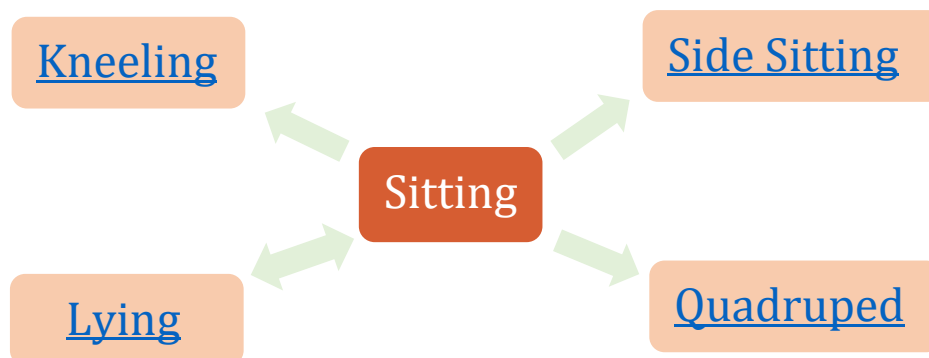
The “[Professional Sitter](#)” is our fond name for those children who take right to sitting and are happy as can be there! They enjoy observing as opposed to exploring. You may have even noticed that these kiddos are better at sitting then they are at rolling – the other major early gross motor milestone. These are the observations you want to make early and work against.

First, be careful not to be an enabler! Sometimes a kiddo who might need just that little extra push to become an explorer ends up settling into “professional sitter” because the minute they fuss or complain because something is out of reach the problem is solved for them by either someone picking them up or by someone bringing them the object.



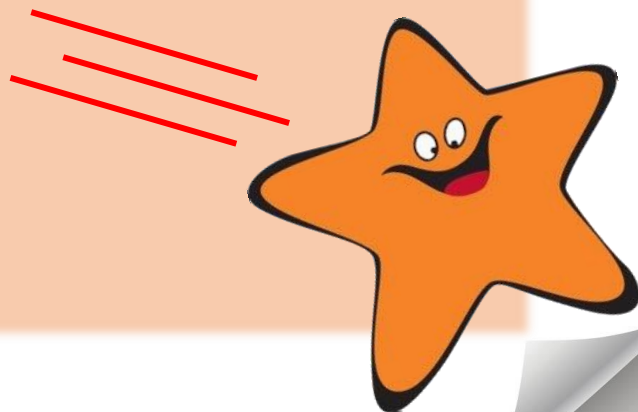
Instead, encourage movement! The hang up usually stems from not knowing how to [get in and out of sitting](#) in order to move about! [Transitional movements](#) are the gateway to independent exploration which, in turn, has a large impact across all developmental areas. This is why we want to give these professional sitters a new career!

[Transitions](#) include more than just getting in and out of sitting. If a baby is predisposed to want to stay in sitting, they likely won't seek out or independently attempt these other movements either. Check out the options below and follow the instructional videos to guide you in how to help your baby get on the move!



If you've read these posts and tried these ideas and are still struggling, check out our [virtual wellness programs](#) that offer more guided support.

6-7 Months



Floor Time

If you've read our [earlier editions](#) you'll see that the structure of these chapters is slightly different. The previous books feature monthly chapters that are more position based. However, as you're probably observing, children this age are not preferring to hold positions as much as move all about! To reflect that, our style is shifting to focus on both the positions and how kids move in and out of them!

Even with this shift to movement focus, parents will still find resources everywhere that express the continued importance of "floor time." But what does this mean? When you read that, does the author mean that sitting counts too? And kneeling? While yes, those take place on the floor, when therapists/pediatricians etc. refer to floor time they just mean unencumbered, [unstructured play](#) on the floor.

Sitting is important developmentally at this stage and targeted practice is valuable. But pediatric professionals don't want parents to lose sight of the benefits of unstructured play in the lying position just because baby is now working on sitting. They have to learn how to get to sitting on their own somehow right? How better than to be playing freely in lying on the floor and [exploring](#) different movements, weight shifts, and transitions? This time to problem solve through weight shifts and various body positions translates long term into motor planning and coordination well beyond sitting.

Now that the term is defined a bit, let's dive in!



Tummy Time

At this age, rolling should be pretty mastered* which is great! But also can mean that kiddos roll out of tummy time out of preference for another position. While practicing these transitional movements is important, so too is still clocking enough minutes on their bellies. Try some of these ideas to keep tummy time interesting:

*If this isn't the case for your child, check out more of our ideas below and consider trying our [6 week rolling program](#) either at your own pace or with virtual assistance from one of our therapists!

- With toys in a slightly elevated position, encourage them to [reach up](#) with one hand to practice holding their weight on one side
- Place items *slightly* out of reach to the side. This will encourage them to [pivot](#) their body towards it
- Is your baby already pivoting? Try placing it in front of them out of reach and see if they will pull themselves forward in a [belly crawl](#)



- Try using a slick surface like hardwood floors with clothes on to make movement a bit easier. This will encourage both pivoting and belly crawling
- Don't be surprised if forward isn't the first direction they go! As babies explore pushing and pulling with their arms they often discover movement backwards early on.

Rolling

Rolling, like we mentioned, is probably something your little one is engaging in on their own now-a-days. Keep giving them opportunities for this by placing them down in varied positions (sometimes belly, sometimes back, sometimes side) so they move between them! Or incorporate games like rolling on pillows, blankets, or towels into play.

Let's Get Up!

Sitting

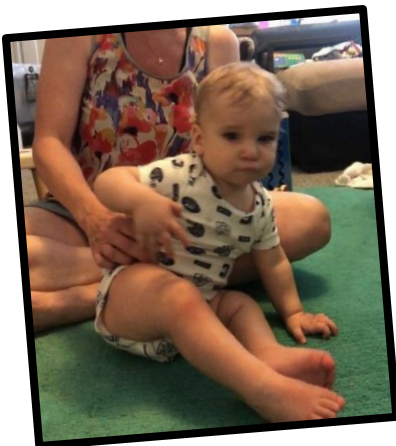
Babies at this point can sit propping on their arms and are gaining independence with sitting fully on their own. If your kiddo is at this stage, you're probably noticing a few topples and wondering what you can do to help. Try out some of these fun ideas:

1. Prop and reach

- Babies will (eventually) stop themselves from toppling sideways or forwards by putting their hands out
- Help them learn to press up through their arm (rather than just prop or rest on it) by having them hold themselves on one arm and reach out and up and all around with the other

This is called
protective extension

2. Slow them down



- Help your baby develop the reaction required to utilize protective extension
- When you are sitting and playing with your baby, if you see them start to tip to the side too far, don't stop the fall fully
- Instead, use your hands to help slow them down and give them time to get their hand to reach out

Side note: It is normal for babies to develop this forwards and sideways first so be more on guard with backwards losses of balance because babies will not have the protective mechanisms for backwards falls until 9 months or so.

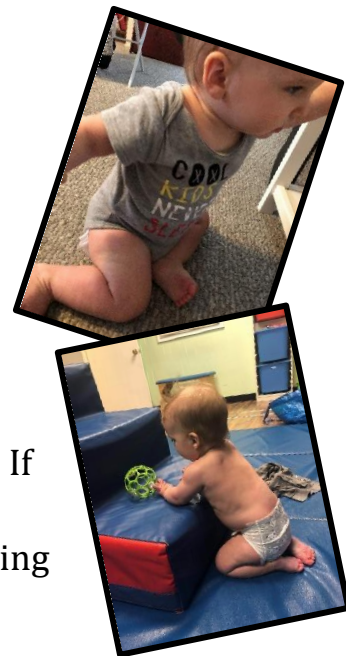
- Rides! Try a laundry basket or slowly while sitting on a towel/blanket!



- Using a space like a box or laundry basket offers them boundaries to catch themselves against when you slide them side to side or forward and back which keeps it safe but also lets them get in practice!
- As with the side note above, backwards will be last to develop so place them with their back against or very near one of the edges of the box or basket before doing the forward and back direction

You can also help your baby strengthen and learn balance in various positions now that regular sitting is easier such as:

- [Side sitting](#)
 - This is a great position for the prop and reach listed above!
- [Kneeling](#)
 - For starting with [this position](#) their bottom can rest on their feet and their hands on a surface in front.
 - This is a great way to incorporate “creating opportunities” as we talked about on [page 3](#). If a desirable object is on a slightly elevated surface, baby might pull from prone to kneeling to get at it! You’ve created an opportunity to learn/practice a transition!



REMINDER! Don’t place them in these new positions. If they can’t get there themselves, then guide them through it!

If the basics of sitting are still difficult for your baby at this stage, consider checking out our [6 week sitting program](#)!

Let's Get Up Even Higher!

Now that babies are exploring more diverse positions outside of sitting, additional doors of play have opened! Crawling, climbing and pulling up are all on the horizon. Try out some of these ideas to help your child prepare for these accomplishments!

- “Modified” [quadruped](#)
 - This is good for early practice of the crawling position (normal around 8 months)!
 - Prop them up on hands and knees over your leg or a round pillow
 - Kneeling with [hands on a low surface](#).
Because the surface is lower, their bottom may naturally come off their heels so that this is more like a true “quadruped” than just more kneeling.
 - Try and encourage them to pull their knees up under them to get into this position. You can do this by stabilizing your hands over theirs or by giving them a slight lift/boost from under their arms to make it easier to pull their legs under them.
- Let's move!
 - As the month progresses and you're kiddo is holding these positions well, try [sliding the surface](#) (in this case the cushion) forwards slowly and slightly and see if they will follow with their knees
 - If the surface is low enough, like this cushion, see if you can help them put one knee up onto it and [climb on](#)!



7-8 Months



Floor Time

Time spent on the floor is now much less about lying still on their back or stomach and more about exploring! Free, unstructured play on the floor is valuable to various aspects of development for all of the [opportunities](#) it creates so incorporate as much of this time as you are able! Opportunities that might be created include:

- [Pivoting](#) and [belly crawling](#)
 - Keep the toy options to just a few highly motivating toys and start with them slightly out of reach in different areas
 - Now your baby can roll, pivot, or [pull themselves forward](#) on their belly to find their favorite and learn about the utility of mobility!
- Transitioning [between lying and sitting](#)
 - A hugely important skill for developing baby's sense of independence!
 - Place some favorite toys on an elevated surface near your baby or have something dangling just out of reach and watch them rise (literally!) to the occasion
- Pushing up into quadruped or kneeling at a support
 - Encouraging baby to [rock or bounce](#) in this position with music or clapping helps develop their stability and understanding of weight shifting.
 - As they get more stable, progress the weight shifting challenge by promoting [reaching](#) for something up higher! They'll either reach up with one hand or transition from quadruped to sit. Oh the [opportunities](#)!
 - Some babies may even start crawling ([or nearly](#)) in this month! See [below](#) for more ideas on this specifically.



Let's Get Up!

Let's keep building and refining our independent sitters! Many of the ideas from previous chapters for practicing [sitting balance](#), [righting reactions](#), and [protective extension](#) continue to be applicable even if you've been practicing them for a few weeks. These reactions take time to learn and then refine into efficient and effective mechanisms. Progress them by increasing the speed or force (within reason) and reducing your support!

Just because your baby can sit in place on their own doesn't mean their work is done! This is called *static* balance. They need that [dynamic balance](#) too! This means being able to turn and look over a shoulder (rotate their trunk) or lean and reach to the side without toppling over. Try out some of these ideas!

- Reaching to bat at dangling objects
 - [Up and in front](#)
 - Also [across body](#)
- Reaching for toys placed to the sides of their knees or hips (the further back the object the harder)
- Turning to look towards a sound behind them (clapping, rattle, musical toy)
 - They may even pivot on their bottom to get in front of it
- Rocking on a pillow or your lap
- Bouncing on a [physioball](#)



These can be practiced in any sitting position not just ring sitting! Just remember the harder the position, the more the challenge.

As you work on these dynamic sitting activities, your baby is learning balance and weight shifting and is gaining a drive to move towards their desired objects. Because of this you may see them moving between and exploring different sitting and transitional positions like [side sitting](#) and kneeling with less prompting from you! Here are a few pointers for these positions:

- Side sitting
 - Try on your lap as an intermediate so that the amount of hip rotation they need is less
 - Practice some hip rotation with games like [windshield wipers](#)!
- Kneeling
 - [Check on their position](#), just like we didn't prefer w-sitting, wide set knees should be avoided. This is not a position which optimally builds their hip and core strength!

W-sitting

[W-sitting](#) is a hot topic around gross motor and physical development. For a more in depth analysis and discussion check out our [blog post](#). Here, we want to highlight the impact that this preference can have on transitions and the acquisition of movement skills at this developmental stage. Towards that end, let's talk [trunk rotation](#)!

When children are learning to transition between positions in order to progress their independent mobility and exploration, the ability to twist their trunk and move through different planes of motion is important! This is why side sitting is such a useful intermediary position to practice. Babies who w-sit (and hang out in this position rather than moving in and out of it often) tend to learn transitions in the forward/backward plane only (termed "AP plane") by leaning forward to get onto hands and knees rather than transitioning over their side and introducing new planes of motion. By limiting the planes of motion that they move between they limit their movement options and opportunities which can manifest in challenges with hitting gross motor milestones down the line including cruising and walking. The takeaway? Even if your kiddo w-sits, introduce lots of [positional options](#) and variety!

Let's Get Higher!

Onwards and upwards! Beyond sitting, babies at this age are progressing their skills on their hands and knees as well as in upright. Which of these ideas does your baby like to try?



Quadruped:

- Is your baby holding this position and rocking? Play some music here and rock with them!
- Encourage them to play with more weight shifting by [reaching](#) for different toys held slightly in front of them or on an elevated surface!
- Early crawling fun! Practice having baby [climb over your legs](#) or [climb up onto a cushion](#) for example
- Is your baby taking off with this? Introduce baby's first [obstacle course](#) and line up more than one surface for climbing.

Standing:

- [Pulling up](#) on their own is emerging! Does your baby push up through [both feet](#) or lift one leg at a time?
- Practice "[half kneel](#)" for hip and core strength and maturing their pull to stand!
- Baby is more independent in standing meaning they can stand with just holding your hands or just holding onto a surface (like the edge of the couch or the bars on the crib)
- Now is a great time to start working on how to [get out of standing](#)! The earlier they can master this the less frustration you both will experience. Check out some of the practice ideas in [this video](#)!



8-9 Months



Floor Time

As your baby is getting older, stronger, and more mobile they are likely not staying still on the floor too much anymore. In fact, this may now be a lot more about belly crawling and [crawling](#)! Is your baby still at an in between stage like [this](#) or [this](#)? Try out some of these ideas:

- With their hands on something that slides, [move it forward](#) so they follow on their knees
- Lots of reaching and rocking on their hands and knees!
- [Climbing onto and off of pillows](#) or other low surfaces like this helps mature their crawling pattern!



Is your baby starting to crawl more maturely? Challenge them with some of these ideas:

- Crawl through a tunnel
- [Crawl up stairs](#) (or [mock stairs](#) if you don't have any!)
- [Crawl backwards](#) down off a cushion or low surface
- [Baby obstacle courses](#)!
 - Climb over obstacles
 - Crawl through tunnels
 - Try out various shapes and sizes of obstacles
- Try on different surfaces/environments like sand and grass

All of these ideas help develop baby's motor planning and provide more opportunities for strengthening!

If you notice that your child isn't progressing towards crawling as expected or as outlined in this book, consider trying our [6 week crawling program](#) either at your own pace or with virtual assistance from one of our therapists!



Let's Get Higher

With all their practice in sitting and crawling, babies are getting pretty strong! In their explorations you'll likely be seeing them in an upright position [more and more often](#) so why not try out some of these ideas!

[Getting into stand](#)

- [Pulling up](#) via [half kneel](#) is the most common
 - Baby should now be able to [isolate one leg](#) rather than pushing up through both
- Make sure they work on doing this through both sides! If your baby has a preference for one leg, try some of [these ideas](#)
- Standing up from sitting on your lap or a bench
 - Put something in front of them on a slightly higher surface encouraging them to lean forward
 - Try helping them with a tap to their bottom or by helping them push into their feet



Now that we're here... let's have some fun in standing! Now is the time when standing independence and skills are becoming more of a developmental focus. Try some of these ideas to start progressing your baby's confidence in standing!

- Stand at support surfaces of different heights
 - Belly button to chest height surfaces will be easiest
 - Vertical surfaces will be hardest
 - Unstable surfaces introduce a different challenge as well! Try standing at an exercise ball.
- Consider standing with their back against the wall or your legs with something engaging in front of them? Will they hold themselves up for a few seconds?

We don't expect 9 month olds to be great at this yet but they are certainly ready to try!



Don't forget to help them learn how to [get out of standing](#) on their own. They'll learn important muscle control (though [plopping is ok](#) and even expected at first!) and gain more confidence and independence knowing that they won't be stuck there!

Standing At Night

With your baby learning all these new skills, the novelty and newfound independence are bound to [interrupt their sleep](#) (recall the rolling at night excerpt in our [last edition](#)). Now that your little one is able to pull up to standing, your baby may just be too excited to practice to keep it to only the daylight hours! How can we handle this to help baby (and you!) maintain good sleep habits?

Answer: A similar approach as we discussed before! Persevere. Let them let them fuss for a little bit and odds are they will either figure it out themselves. If it gets to a point where you must intervene walk them through how to lower back to sitting or lying down rather than picking them up and placing them. This is an opportunity for learning! If we do it for them instead, what they learn is to keep crying for help rather than problem solve. One thing that you can work on with baby both in and out of the crib that will help this particular situation is making sure they can [sit down from standing](#) just as well as they can pull up into it! Check out [page 16](#) for more on this.

Cruising:

If your baby is on the earlier side of developing standing confidence they may start showing interest in movement. This would be indicated if they are [comfortable standing](#) at a support surface with their feet underneath their shoulders (not wide) and if they're exploring things like [bouncing](#) and rocking side to side.

If they're ready for this then you've probably already practiced some reaching both close and just [outside of reach](#) while standing. Try and work past this if they're showing all the signs of being ready! Once they're reaching for the object move it just inches further and see what they do.



Quick Tip:

Move slowly! And start with just an inch at a time. These kids are smart and they can sense when you're making something harder!

If they're not quite taking the bait yet, not to worry! Try some of these intermediary ideas to work up to it:

- Standing and [reaching](#)
- Standing between surfaces (see picture to the right)
- Standing at more dynamic surfaces like a physioball or rocking chair
- Dancing!
 - Try while holding your hands or while holding onto support



My Child Isn't Crawling Yet...Should I Be Concerned?

Crawling is often a baby's first method for getting around efficiently and independently. Developing the skill of crawling is expected between the ages of 7 and 10 months however, some children achieve this milestone outside of this age range or [skip it all together](#) using a different method such as scooting. With either one of these situations, parents often wonder, should I be concerned? You'll probably find a range of answers.

Some perspectives assert that crawling is a critical skill for the development of strength, motor planning, and coordination for more advanced skills at an older age. The alternative perspective is that exploration and independence is the important feature and as long as a child has that ability, no matter the means, there is not immediate cause for concern. Regardless of the "correct" perspective, experts agree that crawling carries a lot of benefits and in clinic we sure see these:



- **Helps develop core muscle strength:** a child must activate their core muscles to fight gravity and keep their spine in a neutral position while on hands and knees
- **Provides strengthening for the arms and shoulders:** weight bearing through the arms requires constant activation of muscles at their hands, wrists, elbows, and shoulders and gives children the opportunity to develop strength and stability at several joints at once.
- **Increases hip stability:** a child must activate the muscles around their pelvis to tuck their legs underneath them and keep them there, which is essential for standing and walking.
- **Improves postural stability and head control:** stimulates postural muscles in the upper back and neck which supports a child engaging with his or her environment in a variety of positions.
- **Promotes coordination and body awareness:** gives a child opportunity to build coordination of using arms and legs in a reciprocal manner, which is essential for walking, going up and down stairs, and even riding a tricycle or bicycle.

Check out some of our [resources](#) for more ideas to work towards crawling. If more support seems needed it might be time to try out one of our [milestone wellness programs](#) or consult your local physical therapist.

Well Done!

Big congratulations for all of the accomplishments you and your child earned over the last 3 months! No one says it's easy but we hope we've helped to make it fun! Even still, sometimes you need an extra support system. We're here! If you are looking for more support or resources contact us to talk to one of our experts:

Starfish Therapies

(650)638-9142

admin@starfishtherapies.com

www.starfishtherapies.com



Resource Party

Coming
Soon!

Next edition of purposeful play ideas and positions for 9-12 months!

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