

COACH DAVE'S CORNER

When “obvious” isn’t so obvious...

BY DAVID S. GESLAK

I began working with Roan when he was three years old. Like most newly diagnosed children at that age, his attention span was short and he was scripting and bouncing wall-to-wall. Giving him dumbbells was not an option, nor could I ask him to sit down and “listen to me.”

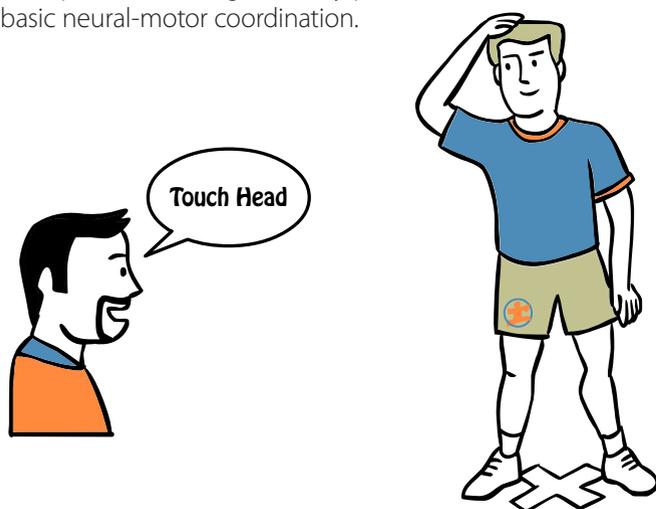
I laid out visual support cards identifying each part of the body. When I could capture his attention, I would say, “Touch your leg,” or “Show me your arms.” Independently identifying these and other body parts took time but he was making progress. And as he did, I began to challenge him more. I would say, “Touch your *right* leg,” or “Reach your arms to the sky.”

Body awareness aligns with an individual’s fundamental motor skills. Too often children and adults with autism don’t know their hand from their foot, or their right from left. For some reason, this fundamental *lifelong* skill is being skipped in their IEPs. This is unacceptable. If you, or an educator, is going to teach your child exercise, it is vital he know the parts of his body and what actions each can perform. And those actions, “Shake your hips,” “Touch your toes,” “March your legs,” and “Flap your arms like a bird,” are getting your child exercising!

BODY PART IDENTIFICATION

OBJECTIVE

To improve knowledge of body parts and basic neural-motor coordination.



DAVID S. GESLAK, BS, ACSM-HFS, CSCS ...

...Coach Dave, founder of the Exercise Connection (EC), is widely recognized for the pioneering of structured visual exercise programs, as well as his insightful and dynamic presentations. Dave has experience as a para-educator and was a Fitness Coordinator at Giant Steps, a school for children with autism. He is an author, advocate, hosts a TV Show “Coach Dave” on The Autism Channel, and trains parents and professionals across the world on his protocols. He employs individuals with autism at the EC and is developing the first employment program, incorporating exercise, within Hart Schaffner Marx, a company in Chicago. The autism community has enthusiastically embraced Dave’s message and is especially encouraged by his results. ◀



This may be the most important place to begin an exercise program. And if you, your child’s developmental therapist, or special education teacher is without an exercise background this is *easily* administered.

Each week as I returned to work with Roan his parents would share with me, “When you left, he would script, “Right arm,” “Left hand,” and “Right toes.” They said his OTs and PTs weren’t teaching him these concepts. Now, four years later, he can identify all his body parts and knows his right from his left.

Learning the difference between right and left and identifying body parts are all building blocks for a solid foundation of self awareness, taking instruction, building confidence, and exercise. Every month Roan makes progress, and there is no telling where it will lead. Right, left, or straight ahead. But never backwards!

HOW TO

- 1 Give the child verbal instructions. If he is unable to process the instruction, show him the visual support card.
- 2 If he begins to understand, then help him to distinguish between the right and left sides of the body, e.g. right hand.

HOW MANY

- ▶ This should be practiced daily, especially if, the child does not understand their body parts.

COACHING TIPS

- ▶ Do not rush your child; give him time to process your requests.
- ▶ When beginning, do not model the action. It is important to know whether the child can verbally or visually understand what you are asking.
- ▶ Show excitement at the correct response!
- ▶ This can be done in large groups. However, in a group setting it is best not to have the children facing each other so they do not model the action. This will provide you with a true assessment of their abilities.



As your child improves, start teaching the specific muscles. For example, “Show me your biceps.” ◀

