Cross That Line! (Midline, That Is!)
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Have you ever heard the expression, “You’re crossing the line!” It usually means that someone is starting to behave in an undesirable way, and it’s a line you typically don’t want to cross. But there is a line that should be crossed. That line is called “midline.” “Midline” is an imaginary line that separates the right side of your body from the left. It runs down the center of your body from the top of your head, all the way to the ground between your left foot and right foot. When you “cross midline,” you move one part of your body (such as an arm or leg) across that imaginary line to the other side of your body.

Is Crossing Midline Important?
Crossing midline is a critical part of getting the two sides of your body to work together to complete a task. You must be able to cross midline in order to scratch your elbow, put your shoes on, catch a ball, and write across a page without switching hands. Children who have difficulty crossing midline often seem to have less-developed fine motor skills, poor hand-eye coordination, and difficulty with gross motor activities. Difficulty crossing midline isn’t limited to just your arms and legs though; It can even affect your eyes! If you have difficulty tracking across midline with your eyes, you can have difficulty reading from left to right across a page.

Activities to Promote Crossing the Midline

- **Practice during snack time.** Spread pieces of cereal, carrots, or other snack food across your child’s eating area. Urge him/her to reach all of the pieces of food with only one hand.
- **Pop bubbles.** Give your child something to hold in one hand so he/she has to use the other hand to pop the bubbles. Blow bubbles on the right and left sides of your child to encourage him/her to cross midline to reach the bubbles.
- **Drive a toy car.** Create a “track” on a table using paper, cards, or blocks. Encourage your child to drive a toy car along the track using just one of his/her hands. Then have him/her switch the toy car to the other hand and drive the car back to its starting position.
- **Play ball.** Throwing, catching, or kicking a playground ball is a great way to practice crossing midline. Throw or roll a ball to your child’s left side, then throw or roll a ball to his/her right side for added practice.

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While crossing midline is not a skill that we often think about, it is an important foundation for so many other skills that are critical for a child’s growth and development. If you think your child may have difficulties with crossing midline or other fine motor skills, do not hesitate to ask your child’s physician for information regarding occupational therapy services. If your child is in school, you can discuss your concerns with his/her teacher. Finally, you can visit the American Occupational Therapy Association’s website (www.aota.org) for a list of occupational therapists in your area. For additional information related to fine motor skills and occupational therapy, see Handy Handouts #121 “Help Your Preschool Child Develop Fine Motor Skills,” #145 “Fine Motor Milestones,” and #165 “What Is An Occupational Therapist?”

Resources: