

# Physical development

## Early childhood learning trajectories



## What is physical development?

Physical development occurs as children learn how to use and take care of their growing bodies. It is an important domain and a foundation for other learning and development. Children use their bodies for learning, by moving around and interacting with people and their environment. While many physical changes in early childhood happen through maturation, early childhood education and care (ECEC) services can support and extend children's physical development in many different ways. Physical development involves 4 key components:

- Gross motor skills involve using the large muscles of the arms, legs and torso. These skills includes using muscles individually or in whole-body movements such as walking.
- Fine motor skills involve using the small muscles of the hands, wrists, fingers, feet, toes, lips and tongue. These skills enable children to talk, draw, write and play.
- Sensory awareness enables children to perceive, process and react to sensory information such as touch, smell, sound, vision, taste and sense of balance.
- Physical health and self-care involves children gaining independence in meeting their basic physical needs, including for rest, activity, nutrition, safety and hygiene.

## Early Years Learning Framework

AERO's Early Childhood Learning Trajectories align with the principles, practices and outcomes of the [Early Years Learning Framework V2.0](#). The [Early Childhood Learning Trajectories: User Guide](#) provides further information and demonstrates how the Learning Outcomes can be mapped to domains.

## National Quality Standard

[Quality Area 2 – Children's Health and Safety](#)

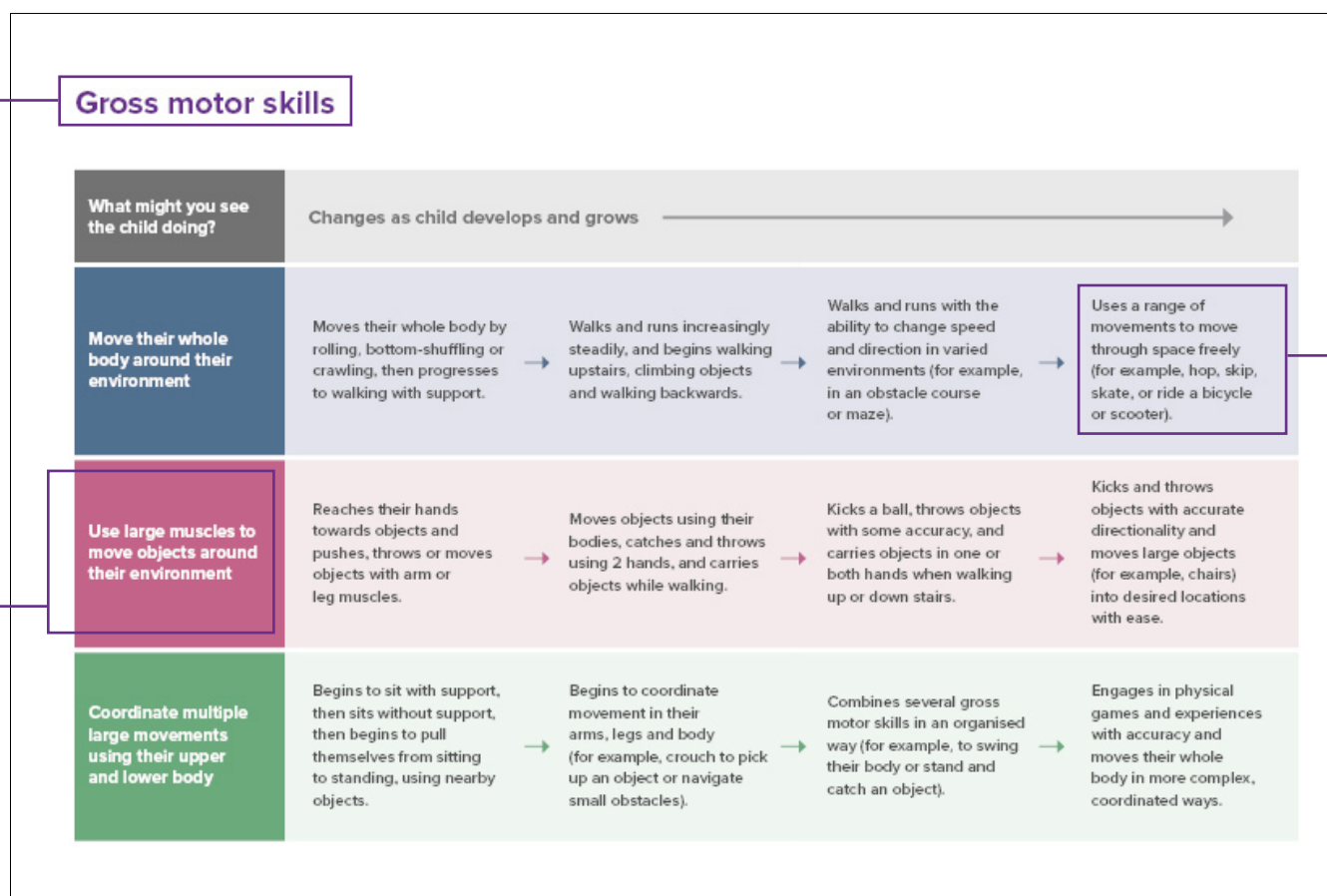
## How to use the Early Childhood Learning Trajectories

These learning trajectories will help you observe children’s progress in physical development and plan the next steps in their learning and development. They will give you language and ideas for documenting children’s learning and development, and for your conversations with families and colleagues about children’s progress. The trajectory is not a checklist. You are encouraged to use your professional knowledge and judgement in determining how each child may demonstrate progress along each trajectory, and how best to support their learning.

The domain for this set of learning trajectories is physical development.

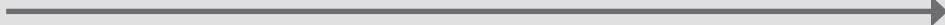
Within this domain, there are **4 subdomains**: gross motor skills, fine motor skills, sensory awareness, and physical health and self-care. Each subdomain is presented in a separate table.

Within each subdomain, there are **3 strands**, describing the capabilities that change over time as children learn and develop.

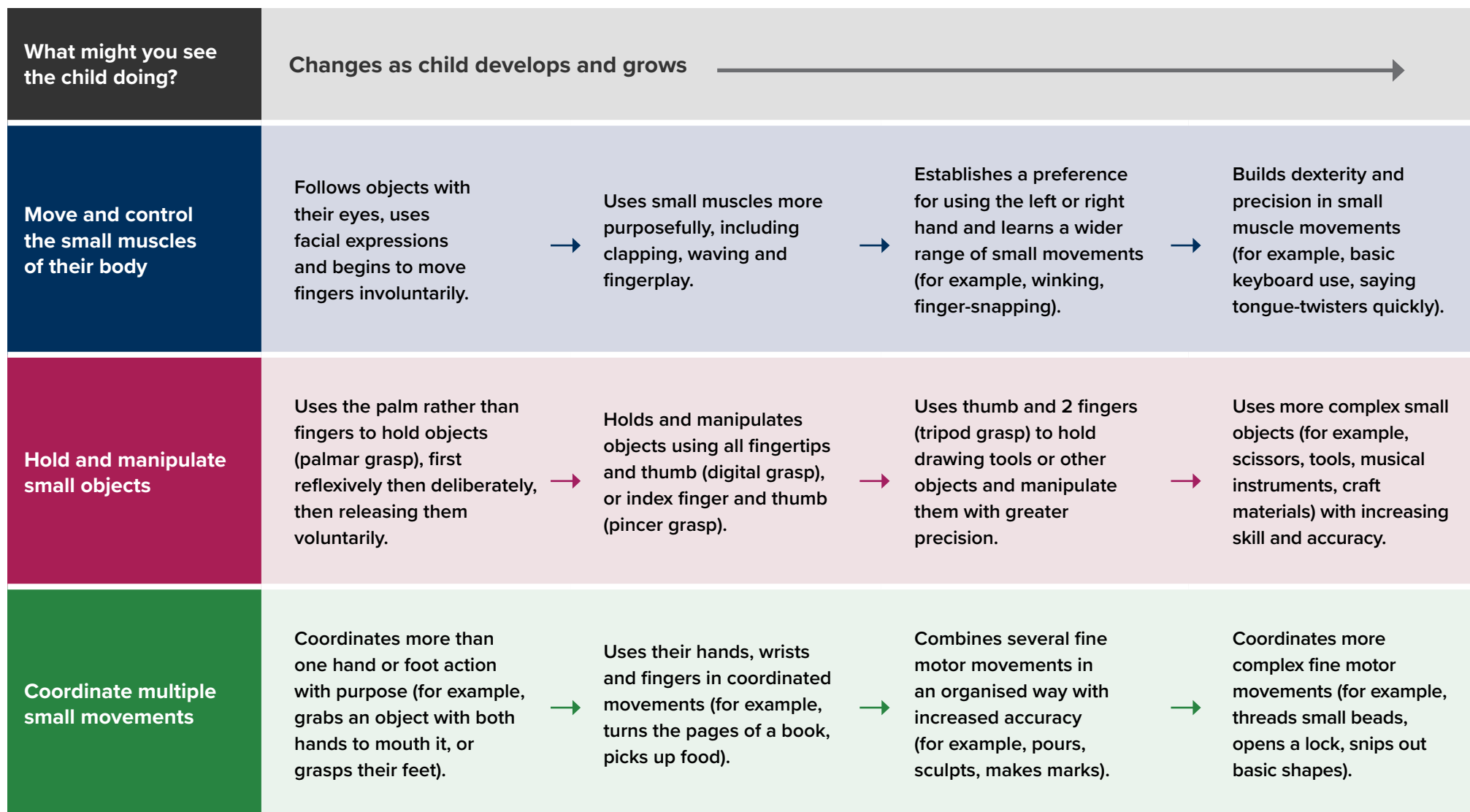


Within each strand, there are **indicators** that describe what you might observe as children progress along the trajectory. These indicators build on one another over time.

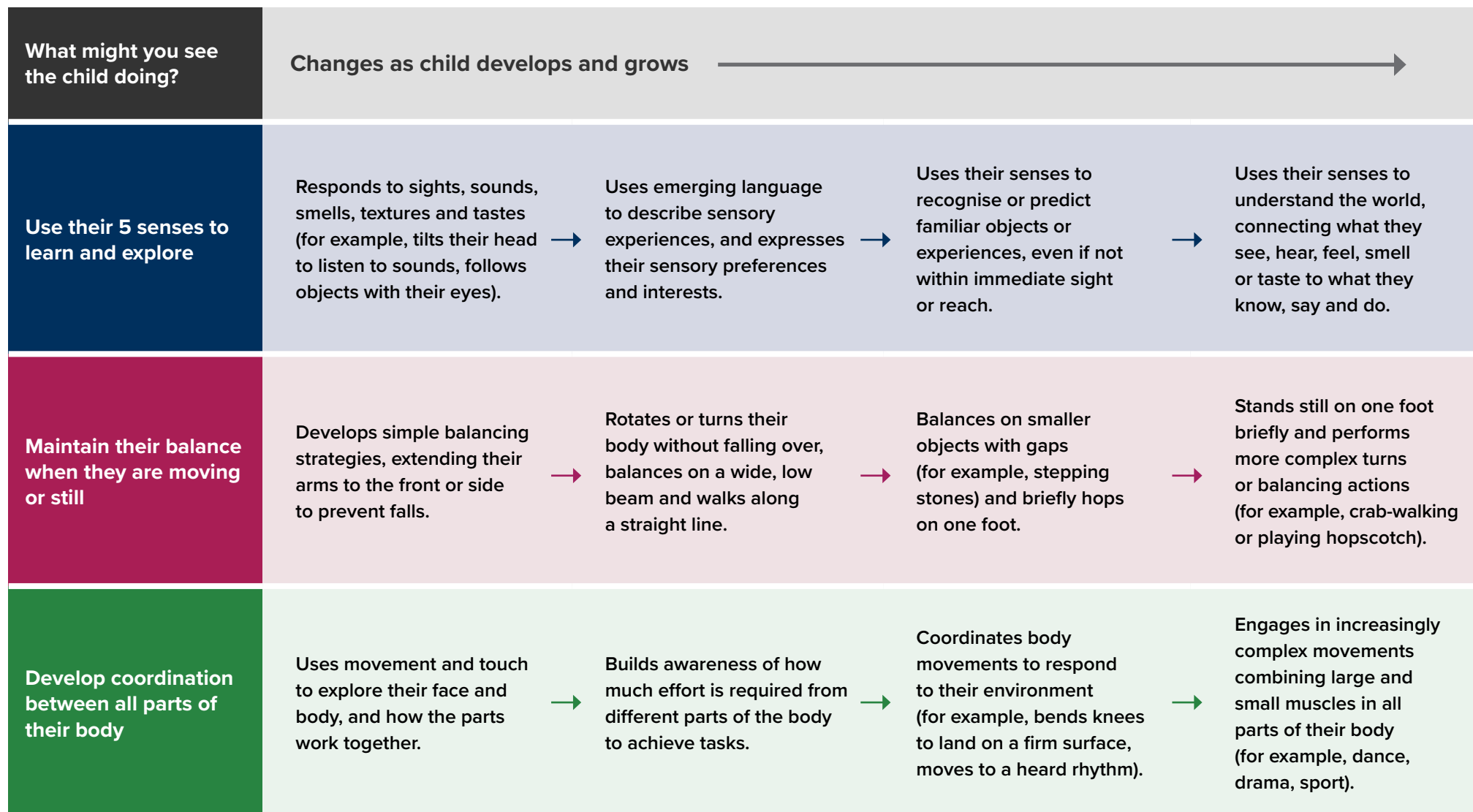
## Gross motor skills

What might you see the child doing?	Changes as child develops and grows 			
<b>Move their whole body around their environment</b>	Moves their whole body by rolling, bottom-shuffling or crawling, then progresses to walking with support.	Walks and runs increasingly steadily, and begins walking upstairs, climbing objects and walking backwards.	Walks and runs with the ability to change speed and direction in varied environments (for example, in an obstacle course or maze).	Uses a range of movements to move through space freely (for example, hop, skip, skate, or ride a bicycle or scooter).
<b>Use large muscles to move objects around their environment</b>	Reaches their hands towards objects and pushes, throws or moves objects with arm or leg muscles.	Moves objects using their bodies, catches and throws using 2 hands, and carries objects while walking.	Kicks a ball, throws objects with some accuracy, and carries objects in one or both hands when walking up or down stairs.	Kicks and throws objects with accurate directionality and moves large objects (for example, chairs) into desired locations with ease.
<b>Coordinate multiple large movements using their upper and lower body</b>	Begins to sit with support, then sits without support, then begins to pull themselves from sitting to standing, using nearby objects.	Begins to coordinate movement in their arms, legs and body (for example, crouch to pick up an object or navigate small obstacles).	Combines several gross motor skills in an organised way (for example, to swing their body or stand and catch an object).	Engages in physical games and experiences with accuracy and moves their whole body in more complex, coordinated ways.

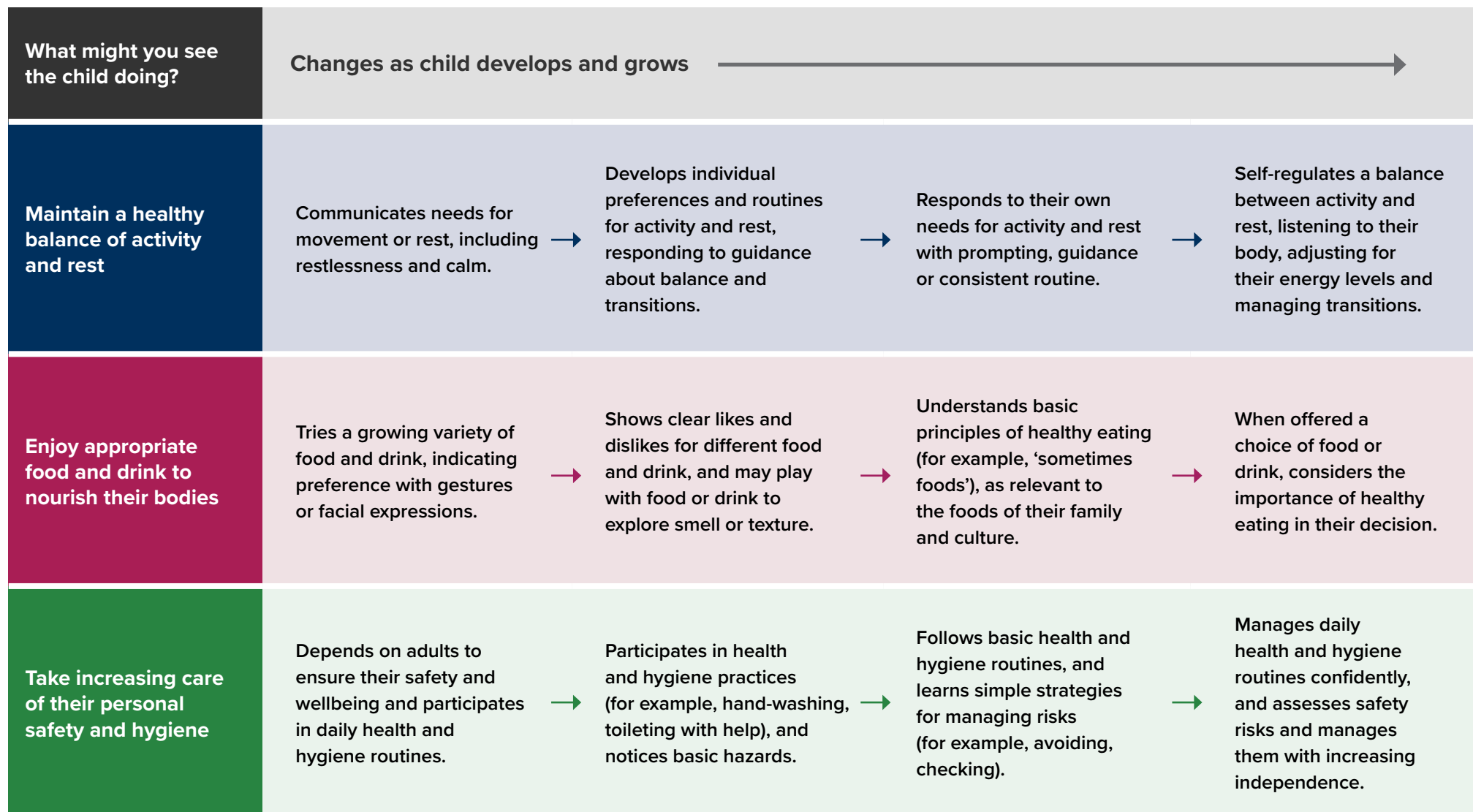
## Fine motor skills



# Sensory awareness



## Physical health and self-care



# Creating opportunities to support children's physical development

## Gross motor skills

- Plan and set up indoor and outdoor spaces to invite age-appropriate physical movement, such as pushing, pulling, climbing and jumping.
- Encourage children to explore different body positions, such as lying on their tummies, touching their toes, standing tall, crouching or bending.
- Incorporate movement into learning experiences, such as stretching, dancing, action songs, balancing, and physical sports and games.
- Notice and celebrate children's efforts to move, from infants stretching for toys to older children inventing new dances or games.

## Fine motor skills

- Incorporate many small movement experiences, including grasping, holding, manipulating, turning, pinching, blowing and threading.
- Foster fine motor skills to support language development, encouraging children to move their mouths while talking, singing or eating.
- Plan experiences that strengthen hand muscles, such as pressing and squeezing play dough or clay, or scrunching or tearing paper.
- Provide a range of small materials, tools and objects to grasp, hold and use that are age-appropriate and provide adequate challenge.

## Sensory awareness

- Provide a wide range of sensory experiences in play and routines, including different textures, colours, sounds, tastes and smells.
- Model a variety of descriptive language to help children become aware of and describe what they see, hear, feel, smell or taste.
- Provide safe opportunities for children to feel unbalanced and recover, such as swings, wobble boards, uneven mats or balancing games.
- Help children become aware of how their body works as a whole, such as hugging themselves to feel their back muscles or doing yoga.

## Physical health and self-care

- Offer sleep, rest and physical activity opportunities appropriate for each individual child, including quiet play areas indoors and outdoors.
- Make mealtimes social and engaging, using positive strategies and modelling to encourage children to try a range of healthy options.
- Involve children in daily health and hygiene routines, narrating actions playfully and including reasons why they are important.
- Provide safe opportunities for children to identify and manage risks with increasing independence appropriate to their development.

## About this resource

Our Early Childhood Learning Trajectories are designed for teachers and educators working in ECEC services with children in the years before school. They can support ongoing professional learning, for individuals, and entire ECEC services and teams.

The Early Childhood Learning Trajectories describe how children learn and develop in these key domains:

- [Executive functions](#)
- [Social and emotional learning](#)
- [Mathematical thinking](#)
- [Language and communication](#)
- Physical development.

While each learning trajectory describes children's progress in a single domain, they are designed to be used in interconnected ways. A single experience may support progress in multiple domains at the same time. Progress in one domain may depend on progress in another.

## Further reading

For more information on our learning trajectories research:

- [Early Childhood Learning Trajectories: User Guide](#)
- [Early Childhood Learning Trajectories: The Evidence Base](#)

## More information

The AERO website features [further guidance](#), including practice guides and case studies for early childhood practice. Visit [edresearch.edu.au](https://edresearch.edu.au) for more information.