

6. Qui-qui birds and Little squirrels

The following two exercises are lovely little movements that are especially delightful for little children who are just developing small motor skills! People who experience arthritis in the hands also find them helpful.

The qui-qui exercise is a light and lively exercise that aims specifically to develop agility and dexterity in the fingers.

Imagine that your rod is a tree branch, that you are holding horizontally in front of you. A flock of birds flies onto the rod, and the little birds dance up and down on the rod.

Hold the rod with both hands at shoulder height. Hold the rod balanced on your thumbs, with your fingers on top of the rods. Let each finger tap the rod, one by one. You can practice with first one hand and then the other, and then pair your hands.

Learn to move your fingers as fast as possible, so that they are practically dancing on the rod.

Take it the next step by quickly rotating your wrists so that your fingers are underneath the rod instead of on top. Dance your fingers agilely underneath the rod.

Now learn to move so quickly and gracefully that your fingers dance above the rod and then below, above and below, so fast that the rod seems to hover weightlessly in space as your fingers dance around it.

The “Little Squirrels” strengthens the experience of standing upright and holding the vertical axis.

Imagine that your rod is a tree, and hold it upright. Your hands are two little squirrels that want to chase each other up the tree. One begins at the bottom of the tree, gripping the rod. The other squirrel jumps over the first, tagging it on the way up: this means, you grasp the rod with the other hand, just above the first hand. Hand over hand, your squirrels chase each other up the trunk of the tree, as you hold it firmly in your grip, not allowing it to sway.

You can also hold the rod horizontally, and let the squirrels jump over one another, from side to side. Begin with your hands next to each other, and then let the right hand, the first squirrel “jump over” the other. Then cross the left over right. Continue with right over left, left over right, and lightly and quickly as you can.

Next, let the right hand cross under the rod and grasp it from below. Then the left hand crosses under the right and also grasps the rod from below. Continue with right under left, left under right, lightly and quickly.

You can take this to the next level by then crossing one leg over the other at the same time that you cross your hands! Right over left, left over right, or right behind left, left behind right. This creates a light and lively coordination game!

2. Addendum for working with Children

These two exercises are especially well suited for working with little children, for they address exactly the skills that the little ones need.

Play in the most lively and light way that you can with these simple imaginations of squirrels and birds. You will find that the kindergarteners can barely coordinate their little fingers to dance on the rods: they may squint or squirm or really have to concentrate to attain the liveliness they need. Be gentle with them, and don't push. You may do these exercises for about 5 minutes a day for 7 weeks, and then let them lie for a period. Re-visit them in the winters for another 7 weeks, and then in the spring.

By the time they are in 1st or 2nd grade, you will find these exercises much easier for the children. Any who can't do them yet, however, will be demonstrating to you that their neurological development is slow and they will need extra time with these. As with the kindergarteners, do the exercises for a few minutes a day for certain weeks, unless the child cannot master them: in that case, take time to focus on the skills throughout the entire year.

Another simple exercises you can do with first and second grade children is “Jack be Nimble.”

Jack be nimble,
Jack be quick,
Jack jump over
The candlestick.

Place your rod on the ground in front on your feet, so you could jump forwards over it.
Stand behind the rod, with both feet together.

Point your right foot and with it touch the ground lightly on the far side of the rod. Teacher says “Jack be nimble.” Put your feet side by side again.

Point your left foot and with it touch the ground lightly on the far side of the rod. Teacher says “Jack be quick.” Put your feet side by side again.

Jump over the rod, with both feet together. Teacher says “Jack jump over.”

Jump backwards over the rod, with both feet together. Teacher says “The candlestick.”

(Child doesn’t speak, but imitates the movements throughout.)

The timing on this can be varied: for instance, on the line “Jack jump over,” you can jump both forwards and backwards. Then on “The candlestick” you can jump forwards.

That will leave you standing in front of the rod. Then, you can do “Jack be nimble” and “Jack be quick” pointing your toe backwards across the rod that is behind you. On “Jack jump over,” you can jump backwards and forwards, and then on “The candlestick,” you can jump backwards and end up in your beginning position.

Children love this little game, and you can spend just two minutes on it, before moving on to the next elements in your circle game.