

## Bare Foot Walk

Surfaces around your home – including your backyard – can be a great sensory adventure for young children. Take them on a barefoot to help them explore, process and understand new information.

**You will want to include some of the following surfaces:**

- Concrete
- Grass
- Cardboard
- Wooden planks
- A rug/carpet squares
- Bark
- Stones
- Water trough filled with water
- Towel etc.

It is best if they can take at least 3-4 steps in/on each surface. Before you can start, make sure that no one has footwear on. Once everyone is barefoot, they are ready for an adventure.

Keep things slow and calm to start with and maybe next time add some marching music or try walking backwards or sideways. Hold hands and do it together or be daring and see if you can crawl along the same course on your hands and knees.

Remember to make this lots of fun!

Get your kids to think about how each surface feels, describing what it feels like under their feet and/or between their toes. Ask probing questions to make them think about how each surface makes them feel and what it reminds them of. Make sure you remember to talk through what each surface is and name it!



## *Why should we do it?*

This activity is designed as a sensory activity. From the very first day a child is born, they are designed to explore the world. The senses are their most familiar, most basic way to explore, process, and come to understand new information.

Playing with different types of textures, tastes, and objects also helps children build new ways of talking about the world.

This is why we must allow young children to learn through experience, not just lecture. These children need to use their senses and be engaged in meaningful experiences. As we talk with them about what they are observing and sensing, we give them new language tools to connect with these more familiar sensory tools, building language as well as supporting cognitive concepts specific to the experience.



## *A little extra info for you....*

### **Walking barefoot develops a sense of body awareness or proprioception**

Babies and children learn about their bodies, where different bits are and what they can do with them through all the sensations they receive through nerve endings. Feet and toes are jam packed with nerve endings so that children can feel the ground beneath them in order to develop a sense of where their body is in space, and how they can move to safely negotiate their environment.

By placing shoes on our children's feet we are reducing the amount and quality of sensory information the child is getting about their environment and body. This in turn limits the development of sensory pathways that promote healthy and functional movement patterns. When wearing shoes, we get less information about where we are walking and therefore need to look down to get this information. This increases the risk of losing balance and falling, particularly for toddlers and young children.

### **Walking barefoot strengthens the feet and body**

When walking barefoot we can grip the ground more easily using the muscles of our feet and toes. Our feet are similar to our hands because they have lots of small muscles that allow us to develop finely tuned movements with small muscle adjustments. When we are barefoot, the small muscles in our feet adapt to the shape of our foot and body position based on the surface we are walking on. This not only strengthens these muscles but also results in more effective grip and balance, thereby reducing the risk of trips and falls. When wearing shoes, our feet stop working in the way they were designed which can result in reduced strength and agility. It is only through walking barefoot that we are able to maintain the full function of our feet.

*Activity and information written by Anna Rees-Jones, Sport Bay of Plenty Early Childhood advisor.*