

**GONGE®**

**THE MINI TOP**

## Play and stimulation:

# How to use the Mini Top



Every culture in the world calms children down by cradling them. When we hold a baby in our arms, we instinctively move in a rocking, cradling motion while observing the child's reaction. The Mini Top can be used to rock and cradle the child in the same way. You can use the Mini Top to swing or rock the child depending on their age. When the child is a little older, you can spin it around so its tummy tickles and it starts to laugh. Playing with the Mini Top stimulates a child's vestibular sense, and helps them to detect movement, balance and rhythm (Cf.: Vestibular sense). The stimulation creates continuity and security, without being too intense for the child or burdensome for the parents.

The Mini Top is suitable for newborn babies and children up to four years of age. From four years children will find The Top more challenging.

When using the Mini Top, remember that stimulation should be both enjoyable and fun. Watch the child while you are playing, and keep your eye on how they react. Always respect a child's limits.

### Cushion for the Mini Top

We recommend that you purchase the Mini Top Cushion, which can be placed inside the top to provide a comfortable underlayer and prevent the child from sliding. For babies under two months old, we recommend that you lay the child on a quilt on top of the cushion, so that their head and body are positioned in the centre and do not fall sideways. In particular, the cushion can prevent smaller children, who do not yet have sufficient weight and body stability, from sliding and feeling insecure.

### 0-4 months

Purpose:

- to calm small children
- to stimulate the child's bending patterns so they experience well-being lying on their stomach

A very small child, who cannot yet control its head, should only be rocked gently in the Mini Top. Repetitive, rhythmical, back and forth move-

ments soothe the child, stimulating the vestibular sense. Friction between the floor and the top, as well as the option for the adult to hold the Mini Top, makes it easy to control. This means that the stimulation will not be too intense or erratic.

The Mini Top is particularly well suited to stimulating a child who is very sensitive or immature, for example a premature child.

### The prone position

A child's bending patterns (Cf.: Stretching/bending patterns and the prone position) are stimulated when you gently rock them in the Mini Top. This can have a beneficial effect on their ability to tolerate lying on their stomach. The prone position is important to encourage them to lift and control their head. Children who lie on their stomach will eventually bear weight on their arms, initially on their elbows and, later, their hands. (Cf.: Weight bearing).

### 4-12 months

Purpose:

- for the child to experience joy from movement
- to increase tension in the child's muscles
- to create better balance and stability

As well as enjoying being rocked rhythmically back and forth, the child will also be able to handle the greater stimulation provided when the Mini Top is moved from side to side in a rocking motion.

Once the child has developed proper control of its head movements, the Mini Top can also be used to rouse the child's senses so that they experience pleasure from activity and movement.

### Swing rides

Everyone knows the elated feeling and tickling in the tummy that a slide or swing ride can give. This is because the neurological centres that register rotation and acceleration are closely connected with the pleasure centre in the brain. Consequently, slightly larger children will enjoy a swing ride in the Mini Top.

Start by spinning the Mini Top around once and watch the reaction of the child. Make eye contact, gazing calmly at the child. Once a child shows they are secure and happy, the top can be spun around 2-4 times before taking a break. You can continue the swing ride after this, perhaps by spinning the top around in the opposite direction.

If the stimulation is too intense, with too much speed or too many changes of direction, a child can experience loss of control, consequently becoming insecure and afraid. Therefore, the Mini Top must be used calmly to begin with, so that the child develops the ability to perceive movement as enjoyable, within safe boundaries and without risk of overstimulation and loss of control.

### Stability and muscle tension

Acceleration and change of direction in the Mini Top increase muscle tension, which is further enhanced by the psychological stimulation. Eventually, as a child begins to recognise the stimulation, it will take over more and more of the steering itself. As they move and explore their own balance, muscle strength and activity will keep the swing ride going. The child will discover that, by keeping themselves steady, the Mini Top can go faster when an adult pushes it.

### 1+ years

Purpose:

- to provide independent play
- to help the child gain a sense of the body and its limitations
- to improve coordination

As a child gets older, they need to be able to play, stimulate and move without help. They can now sit upright in the Mini Top, which allows more opportunities for challenging and stimulating their sensory apparatus and motor skills.

The child can now get the Mini Top moving by itself. Using the muscles on the front and back of the

body, the child can swing, tilt, rock and spin around unaided. As they get better at coordinating their muscles, they can make the Mini Top spin around faster and faster.

Many children will still enjoy the more passive stimulation of the adult steering the Mini Top. You can be a little wilder now, as the child is able to say when to stop and when to start. Continue to take breaks while playing, and get the child to stand up. This will enable you to check whether the child is dizzy or able to stand still before the game continues.

## Three alternative games with the Mini Top

### Hide-and-seek

Small children love to hide, and hide-and-seek is a good way to explore both physical and cognitive skills. By learning to make themselves small, a child discovers the size of their body and gains control of their arms and legs. The child also explores their control of impulses by using their ability to be separated, and then be found and reconciled. Younger children will impulsively make a noise to be found, whereas older children will find pleasure in hiding, holding back the outburst and not giving in to the impulse. When turned upside down, the Mini Top is the perfect hiding place. It is designed so that small fingers cannot get caught under the edge, and is a safe place to hide under as the light penetrates through it. Its light weight means that even the smallest child can get under – and out from beneath – the Mini Top without the need for help.

### Throwing at the target

Aiming and throwing are good for strengthening a child's ability to focus for longer periods of time, and for developing hand-eye coordination. Children from around the age of two and upwards take great pleasure in throwing balls and soft toys into the Mini Top. Eventually, as the child becomes successful in hitting the target, the distance between the Mini Top and the child can be increased.

### Aeroplane

Let the child play at being an aeroplane on the Mini Top. Turn the Mini Top over, and let the child lie on top on its stomach and spread out their arms as wings. This position trains a child's ability to stabilise their back and exercises the back muscles.

Physiotherapist Hannah Harboe



The Top

## The vestibular sense

The vestibular sense is a sensory system attached to the inner ear. It registers the movement and placement of the head in relation to space and body. This is where the vertical sense for the body is located, and where acceleration, change of direction and movement are registered.

Stimulation of the vestibular sense, in collaboration with other senses (primarily sight, touch and proprioception), is important for a child to become good at keeping their balance while still or moving. At the same time, the child is able to use the necessary muscle tension to accomplish a correct and coordinated movement.

The vestibular sense helps to keep our heads steady and still, and is therefore of great significance for playing and learning, requiring our eyes to be focused. Stimulation of the sensory system

can give two opposite reactions. On one hand, stimulation with a rhythmical and prolonged rocking motion can have a calming effect and, on the other hand, sudden changes of direction, speed and acceleration can have a stimulating and pleasurable effect.

## Stretching/bending patterns and the prone position

When a small child does not like to lie on their stomach, it may be because the child is affected by a stretching pattern in the body (stretches the back) as opposed to a natural bending pattern (bends the stomach together). A child affected by stretching patterns has a tendency to distribute its body weight higher up on the chest rather than down around the pelvis, which causes discomfort when in the prone position.

## Weight bearing and mobility/stability

Weight bearing promotes bone density and nourishment for joints and muscles. When a child begins to bear weight on their arms and hips in the prone position, they discover that weight has a stabilising effect and can promote movement and mobility. For example, if a child puts their weight on their right hand, they will be able to move their left hand to reach out for toys.



1+2 The vertical edge protects the child's fingers and head from getting squeezed.

