

Health and Wellness Newsletter for Early Childhood Educators

Healthy Eating, Active Bodies, Healthy Minds

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Playing is the Way to Establish Healthy Habits

“Though preschool teachers are under pressure to limit play and spend more time on instruction, mature social pretend play in preschool may be more critical for academic success than preschool academic instruction.”

-Adela Diamond

In a world dominated by media and electronics, a push for academic learning has decreased the child's opportunity for free play. According to educational psychologist Elena Bodrova and Deborah Leong, children learn best through play.

Over the past two decades, children have lost 12 hours of free play a week. Eight of which are unstructured play and outdoor activities, says David Elkind, Professor of Child Development at Tufts University. Some of the trends that have reduce time for free play over the last two decades, include passive entertainment such as television and computer, and also some parents over-scheduling structured activities. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends limiting children's total media time to no more than

two hours of quality programming per day. Children should not be inactive for more than 60 minutes at a time, except while sleeping.

A new report from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) supports the importance of free and unstructured play. Free play helps kids be active and healthy and is essential for helping them reach important social, emotional, and cognitive developmental milestones, as well as manage stress and become resilient. Still, many parents are anxious to keep their children involved in extracurricular activities and academic pursuit of excellence. In many instances they are afraid that if their children do not participate in a hurried lifestyle their children will fall behind. Active free play is important for children's appropriate development and health. The health benefit of free play extends beyond physical health, it also has an impact on the domains of motor skills, psychological well-being, cognitive development, social competence, and emotional maturity. It is also an opportunity for parents and caregiver to engage with children and learn about the world through the child perspective. When children are allowed to free play they can create their own world, conquer fears, practice their roles, and practice adult roles.

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Sources:

American Academic of Pediatrics: The Importance of Play in Promoting Healthy Child Development and Maintaining Strong Parent-Child Bond
<http://www2.aap.org/pressroom/playFINAL.pdf>

Prevention of Pediatric Overweight and Obesity. American Academy of Pediatrics
<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/112/2/424.full.pdf>

Center for Excellence for Early Childhood Development www.excellence-earlychildhood.ca

Teacher's Corner

Creating Opportunities



What has happened in the last ten years with years with children's health? It was generally assumed that children were naturally active. Recent evidence indicates that many young children do not participate in sufficient physical activity to remain healthy. Preschoolers should have at least 60 minutes of "unstructured" physical activity and at least 60 minutes of "structured" physical activity every day. In addition, they should have no more than one hour at a time of inactivity, unless they are sleeping.



Domain:
Physical Development
(PD)



Children will develop their large/gross motor and problem solving skills. This is one example of a free unstructured activity where children can use their imagination, and problem solving skills.

ACTIVITY: OBSTACLE COURSE

Transform the yard or any room into a free-for all obstacle course. Remove unsafe objects from the room (tables with sharp edges, for example) and clear out clutter that someone could trip on. Then place piles of cushions, sturdy chairs, laundry baskets, or other items around the room for the kids to jump over, under, or through. A large cardboard box, if you have one, can become an excellent tunnel.

Tip: Put on some music to encourage moving around.



Domain:
Mathematical Development
(MATH)

Each child should have a spot marker (if not available, make circles with chalks of different colors), and a scarf. Also prepare visual aid cards of a circle, square, triangle, and straight line.

Tip: Put on some music to encourage moving around.

ACTIVITY: SCARF SHAPES

Go over the visual aid cards and ask the children if they recognize the shapes. Explain the activity. The activity includes some instructions from the teachers, but there is also time for children to use their own creativity and feelings. Place scarf outside the spot or circle.

1. Each child stands in their spot or circle, the spot is their home base. Encourage children move their hand up and make imaginary figures without moving from their home base.
2. Teacher will call different colors (scarf colors) if the color matches their scarf they jump and pick up the scarf
3. Show the shape cards one at the time. Teacher show the visual and ask, "Draw a triangle in front of you with the scarf." Next, "draw a circle over your head." "Do a line above your head", "create and square next to you."
4. Add some music and ask the children to freely use their scarves to make figures of their choice while dancing on their home base.



Sources:

Desired Results Developmental Profile - Preschool© DRDP-PS© (2010).
<http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/ci/documents/drdp2010preschooleng.pdf>

National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE) <http://www.nea.org/>

SPARK <http://www.sparkpe.org/early-childhood/curriculum/lesson-plans/>

The Importance of Unstructured Physical Activity for Children

Today's lifestyle reduces most young kids opportunities to get enough movement. Yet, unstructured play and free play is important in the early years for children physical and psychological growth and for developing lifelong healthy behaviors. Recommendations indicate that at least half of the physical activity accumulated by young children should be in active play. Specifically, children age 1 to 5 should get from one to several hours of daily, unstructured physical activity.

- Schools need to provide safe, supervised, unstructured play spaces for active play where children can do physical activities
- Unstructured activity allows time for creativity, self-expression, and cooperation.
- Provide appropriate outdoor space for the number of children using the space.
- Ensure that free play is fun, safe, and allow for experimentation and exploration.
- Whenever possible, schools should provide climbing equipment that meet the safety recommendations and standards.
- Allow children to do physical activities of their own design to promote imagination and social interaction
- Children should be able to practice and learn new skills independently

Finally, the research has shown that boys tend to be more active and less often obese, than the girls. Caregivers and parents should remember that their girls need to spend just as much time and energy being physically active as boys.



Activities that Promote Movement Awareness in Preschoolers

Provide children with the opportunity to explore, discover, and practice movement. It is during childhood that the foundations for body management are laid for movement, recreational activities, and sports. The physical needs of a child include structured and unstructured activities. Preschool children need teachers who encourage and support gradual improvement of movement. Children's movement should focus in exploring and discovering preferences and creating patterns with minimal emphasis on accuracy, or how far, or how fast.



Movement Awareness Categories – *What Can My Body Do?*

Traveling Actions <i>Move the body from one location to another</i>	Stabilizing Actions <i>Movement that requires balance, maintain equilibrium and posture control</i>	Manipulating Actions <i>Object control and precision handling actions mostly with the hands and feet.</i>
Jumping Walking Hopping Sliding Skipping Running Leaping	Twisting Turning Bending Balancing Stretching Curling Swinging	Throwing Catching Kicking Striking Rolling Trapping Tossing

Sources:

SPARK Early Childhood Teaching Tips: Structure Activity vs Unstructured Activity
<http://www.sparkpe.org/blog/structured-activity-unstructured-activity/>

Preschool Physical Education
<http://choosykids.com/CK2-resources/eventhost/Day%20of%20Body%20Language/The%20%20am%20Moving%20Curriculum.pdf>

Educational Resources for Early Childhood Educators

Children's Health and Wellness Books

CAN YOU MOVE LIKE AN ELEPHANT?

Judy Hindley
 Publisher: Corgi Childrens, 2005, 32 pp.
 ISBN-10: 0552548111
 Description: Moving like different animals.
 Suitable for ages: 2-6 years

DANCE WITH ME

Charles R. Smith, Jr.
 Candlewick, 2008, 24 pp.
 ISBN-10: 076362246X
 Description: Two kids bopping down the street get whole town moving!
 Suitable for ages: 4-8 years

FROM HEAD TO TOE

Eric Carle
 Publisher: Harper Trophy, 2007, 32 pp.
 ISBN-13: 9780736869263
 Description: Children imitate the body movements of different animals.
 Suitable for ages: 2-5 years

HOP, SKIP, JUMP, MAISY!

Lucy Cousins
 Publisher: Candlewick, 2012, 16 pp.
 ISBN-10: 0763658138
 Description: Interactive book designed to show kids how to keep active and moving.
 Suitable for ages: 2-5 years

LITTLE YOGA: A TODDLER'S FIRST BOOK

Rebecca Whitford, Martina Selway
 Publisher: Henry Holt and Co., 2005, 28 pp.
 ISBN-10: 0-80-507879-7
 Description: A simple introduction to teach young children simple yoga poses, not an intensive manual.
 Suitable for ages: 1-5 years



Teacher Resources

I am Learning Curriculum, Developing Movement Awareness in Young Children, Linda Carson, PhD. West Virginia University, 2001.

<http://choosykids.com/CK2-resources/eventhost/Day%202/Bod y%20Language/The%20I%20am%20Moving%20Curriculum.pdf>

SPARK, Sports, Play and Active Recreation for Kids! Early Childhood Ages 3-5. San Diego State University

<http://www.sparkpe.org/physical-education/>

Color Me Healthy Curriculum,
<http://colormehealthy.com/>

Healthy and Active Preschoolers,
<http://www.healthypreschoolers.com/>

Additional Online Resources

[Journal of Physical Education, Recreation and Dance.](#)

How Play Influences Children's Development at Home and School.1995; 66 :19– 23

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