

Learning Through Physical Play

Children develop in a holistic manner. Physical development should be seen as being important in young children's development as intellectual development. Research has shown that physical activity in young children can enhance concentration, motivation, learning and well-being.

Generally, our lives have become more inactive and our children have less opportunity for physical activity each day. The reasons for our increased inactivity include:

- Excessive television viewing
- Fewer family members to play with
- Fewer safe outside play areas

Preschools can provide many opportunities for physical play to promote fine and gross motor skills and hand / eye coordination.

Children enjoy physical play, indoors and outdoors. They revel in freedom of movement and in play that is inventive, adventurous and stimulating. Children also learn social skills as they cooperate with one another and show consideration for one another.

Large Muscle Development – gross motor and locomotor skills

- Walk forwards, backwards and sideways
- Walk on tip-toes (balance)
- Running, stopping and starting
- Climb up steps or a ladder with one foot leading
- Pivot around and around on feet
- Jump up and down on the spot on both feet
- Jump a distance
- Balance along a plank 18cms from the ground
- Balance on one leg for 4 seconds
- Crawl through a barrel or tunnel

These basic activities develop body management, balance, bodily co-ordination, strength, agility and confidence.

Fine Motor Skills

- Building blocks
- Assembling construction materials – Duplo etc.
- Putting Jigsaws together
- Grip a pencil or paintbrush
- Hammer shapes into a pegboard
- Pour water or dry sand from one container to another
- Thread beads
- Manipulate Playdough

These activities promote hand-eye coordination, spatial awareness, fine motor control, accuracy, two handed coordination and manipulative strength.

Eye – Hand & Eye – Foot Coordination Skills

- Catch a large ball between extended arms
- Kick a ball
- Pedal a tricycle along a straight line
- Push a large ball away towards a target
- Pull an empty truck around obstacles

These activities promote spatial awareness, hand – eye coordination, strength and foot & leg coordination.

Paint & Junk

- Holding Brushes, pencils (fine motor skills)
- Cutting
- Spreading glue and paint
- Sprinkling glitter (fine finger movement)

Imaginative Play

- Manipulating fastenings on dressing up clothes and dolls (fine manipulative skills)
- Pressing telephone buttons
- Writing shopping lists
- Wrapping parcels
- Using dustpan and brush
- Coordination in pretend cooking – setting the table

Sand and Water

- Pouring, filling, stirring, pushing, pulling, moulding, digging, patting (developing fine motor skills)
- Manipulating tools
- Pouring into containers (Hand – eye coordination)
- Use equipment with skill

Physical and Outdoor Play

- Throwing and catching
- Rolling
- Carrying and passing
- Climbing
- Swinging
- Sliding
- Cycling / driving wheeled toys
- Dancing
- Moving to action rhymes

Small World

- Manipulating play people, farm animals, vehicles (fine motor skills and coordination)
- Threading beads
- Cars into the garage (hand – eye coordination)
- Putting furniture in the house

Construction Play

- Manipulate a range of construction equipment (fine and large motor skills)
- Lifting, carrying
- Develop skills in fitting together and taking apart materials (develop hand – eye coordination and spatial awareness)

Practical Play ideas to use at Home with young children

Young children's joy in movement leads to healthy growth by encouraging them to challenge and exercise their own bodies. Physical play is fun!

A healthy child has lots of energy. He/she needs opportunities to crawl, run, dance, climb, balance and these skills help his/her bones and muscles develop.

What we need for physical play is:-

- SPACE. This could be a park or garden, the beach or field or a playground. Space is run freely.
- Safe equipment and safe surfaces
- Large equipment such as climbing frames, see saws, planks, tyres and stepping stones.
- Small equipment such as balloons, balls, bean bags, hoops, skipping ropes, streamers, trikes, bikes and cars.
- Lots of enthusiasm and energy

Physical activities should not be beyond a child's capability. We can play simple games of catch with our children – Hop-Scotch, Follow the Leader, Statues, Skipping, Ring-A-Ring-A-Rosie, Throwing and Catching games and Hide-and-Seek.

A great deal rests on the acquisition of fine motor skills. Children need these skills in order to become competent in many areas of life:

- Writing
- Handling tools
- Craft skills
- Using cutlery
- Holding brushes
- Handling delicate things, including living things
- Turning the pages of books

In order to accomplish these tasks children need lots of help and practice in using the fine muscles of hands, arms and fingers. We can provide many play activities to help stimulate this development.

- Clay and dough
- Large beads to thread
- Cars, farms, doll houses
- Books with pages to turn, flaps and lift up sections
- Dressing dolls / action man
- Paint brushes, crayons and pencils

For further ideas on Learning Through Play, get a copy of our publication "I Want To Play", available at the Early Years information and resource centre.