



## Resource to Share with Parents: Helping Your Child Develop Physical Literacy

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RESOURCE TO SHARE WITH PARENTS:

Helping Your Child

DEVELOP

Physical Literacy

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The development of physical literacy begins in the very early stages of childhood — even before young children enter the school system and are exposed to structured physical education classes. This means that parents are essential allies in building an early foundation for their children’s development of essential skills that will enable them to move with competence and confidence in a wide variety of physical activities, as well as reap important health benefits. Children today are more sedentary than ever, and to a great extent these habits are acquired in the home. How can early childhood and elementary physical educators engage parents to help their children to become physically literate? This article was written with this goal in mind, and it is hoped that it will become a valuable resource to share directly with parents.

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## Helping Your Child Develop Physical Literacy

**A**s a parent of a young child, you know better than anyone that children love to move their bodies. In fact, it may seem like your child never sits still and is constantly moving all day long. Unfortunately, research tells us that children's levels of physical activity are at an all-time low, which can lead to health problems such as obesity and diabetes. So what can you do to ensure that your child gets enough physical activity each day? The purpose of this article is to answer that question. The key to helping your child be more physically active is to help him or her develop *physical literacy*.

### What Is Physical Literacy and Why Is It Important for Your Child?

You are probably most familiar with the term "literacy" in relation to children's reading and writing skills. Physical literacy is defined as the ability to move with competence and confidence in a wide variety of physical activities in multiple environments that benefit the healthy development of the whole person (Mandigo, Francis, Lodewyk, & Lopez, 2012; Whitehead, 2001). You can think of physical literacy as when a child possesses the skills, knowledge and confidence to safely participate in a variety of physical activities that benefit the development of the whole child. The basic skills your child needs to learn to be physically literate are called fundamental movement skills. Fundamental movement skills include such things as hopping and skipping, as well as throwing and catching. These skills must be learned by children. In other words, fundamental movement skills will not just come naturally as your child ages. To be physically literate, your child also needs to understand certain important movement concepts, such as spatial awareness. Spatial awareness is what allows your child to avoid running into someone and getting hurt while playing in the backyard or on the playground. When your child possesses these skills and knowledge, he or she will be confident and excited to engage in physical activity.

The great thing about becoming physically literate is that your child will not only be a more confident mover, he or she will reap the other benefits of physical activity — cognitively, socially and emotionally (the whole child). During physical activity your child will have the opportunity to problem-solve and be creative, learn to share, and experience ways to release stress and calm down. It can be very reassuring to know that as your child develops physical literacy, he or she will achieve the very

things that matter most to you as a parent — your child will be healthy, happy, and able to make friends.

In the following pages you will find suggestions to help your child develop physical literacy. You do not need any formal training. Your love, encouragement and willingness to participate with your child are the most important things. So let's get moving!

### How You Can Help Your Child Develop Physical Literacy

The following suggestions are intended to assist you in helping your preschool child become more physically literate and to acquire increased social skills, a creative mind, and a healthy body.

Provide appropriate physical playthings to increase your child's desire to be active. Children ages three to five are fond of wagons, tricycles, scooters, lightweight hand-paddles, targets, plastic bowling sets, a variety of balls, plastic shovels, and toy gardening tools. They are also fascinated with push toys resembling adult tools such as wheelbarrows, lawn mowers, shopping carts, pedal vehicles, doll strollers, and vacuum cleaners.

Heighten your child's appreciation for the outdoors by reading stories that take place in settings such as the ocean, forests, valleys, farmlands and mountains. These stories can also lead to conversations about family trips that include walking along trails and hiking.

Yield to the young child's desire for an attentive audience when he or she is initially attempting new motor skills, dancing, singing, or moving creatively. Whenever possible, remain attentive and offer praise.



Serve as a role model and discuss the importance of eating nutritious foods for a healthy, strong body.

Instill an awareness in your urban or community planners that young children must be provided spaces to be physically active. Urge your local planners to maintain free community playgrounds that provide a great variety of movement tasks for all ages, with graduated levels of platforms to climb on.

Convey the idea to your child that moving quickly and being energetic can help us to feel happy when we are sometimes feeling disappointed, sad, or even angry. Remember that active movement is a positive outlet for reducing everyday stress in children and adults.

Ask your child what physical activity he or she would like to engage in, such as a chase-and-flee game, or a ball-rolling game, or even rolling down a large hill. Giving your child a choice of two or three physical activities is a great way to develop early decision-making.

Locate favorite play clothes to eliminate your child's fear that you will be upset if the clothes are dirtied or torn from active movement. As adults, we already know the significance of having preferred workout clothing, and we can instill this thinking in our children.

List a variety of unique physical activities on a piece of paper that might interest your child and his or her friend during a play-date. These could include playing modified hopscotch, creating noise makers and instruments for a pretend marching band, walking while balancing on logs and fences, jumping over lines along the pavement, and using cardboard boxes to create an obstacle course.

Identify process-oriented physical activities such as searching for nuts, pine cones, or leaves found scattered on the ground, or sea shells along the beach. This collection process increases a child's ongoing physical activity and ability to classify objects.

Take part in community playgroups that provide opportunities for mixing age and grade levels so your child can develop an appreciation for other children's more advanced skills, physical strengths, and creative differences.

Expose your child to a variety of outdoor play activities that make use of your child's large muscles. Depending on the season and the weather, these might include running under sprinklers, jumping in piles of leaves, skiing, snow sledding, swimming, and kite flying, as well as playing Follow the Leader, Simon Says, Red Light Green Light, and a variety of hide-and-seek games.

Reveal to your child how easy it is to use natural objects for game play. Examples include using a stick or chalk to make a hopscotch pattern, designing a running path outlined with small rocks, or identifying a favorite tree as the "home base" in a game of tag.

Arrange for your child to interact with different ethnic groups to experience numerous forms of traditional games and physical activities common to a particular culture.

Communicate the need for your young child to receive a quality movement experience in his or her pre-school and elementary school. The conversation can be initiated by asking your child's teacher how much time

is dedicated in the program to outdoor and indoor play and to physical playtime.

Yield greater fun and safety by conducting yearly inspections of your child's physical activity settings. These locations might include the community playground, the local play park or pool, the school, and even the physical education setting. Safety concerns should never be a barrier to your child achieving physical literacy.

## Considerations for Children with Developmental Disabilities

All children are capable of achieving physical literacy, regardless of their individual differences. If your child has a developmental disability, here are three things you can do to help your child develop into a skillful mover: (1) foster success for your child by encouraging choice (e.g., do you want to kick the ball or throw the ball?); (2) provide different levels of challenge (e.g., for the skill of catching, balloons would be easier to catch than large, lightweight inflatable balls); and (3) emphasize performing movements with correct form (technique) and provide feedback to your child about his or her form. This emphasizes the learning process and facilitates the development of physical literacy. Activity modifications are presented throughout this article to assist you and your child.

For children whose developmental disabilities may not allow them to independently walk or perform other types of physical skills, there is an increased focus on powered technology (e.g., motorized wheelchairs and battery-operated ride-on toy cars) to encourage children's self-directed mobility. As one example, the Go Baby Go project converts commercially available, ride-on toy cars for children to use for exploration and play. For more information, and to find a Go Baby Go chapter near you, please visit the following websites:

- <http://sites.udel.edu/gobabygo/>
- <https://www.facebook.com/UDGoBabyGo/>
- <http://health.oregonstate.edu/gobabygo>

## Suggestions for Promoting Fine Motor Skills

Physical skills that focus on the use of fingers and hands are called fine motor skills and are important to developing physical literacy. These coordinated movements of the fingers and hands are essential to performing common tasks that we, as adults, take for granted (e.g., using a fork, buttoning clothes, cutting with scissors, writing with a pencil), as well as for your child to be able to participate in physical play activities. Creative arts, dramatic play, and ball-skill play offer excellent opportunities to practice and develop the small muscles of the hands and fingers.

### *Fine Motor Skills through Creative Arts*

• Provide your child easily obtained art materials to explore creative talents. Age-appropriate products include water-based paints and markers, paintbrushes, crayons, chalk, art paper, play clay, stickers, and an easel. Fine-motor art activities develop a child's wrist stability, the muscles in the sides of the hand, the arches within the palm of the hand, and the open web space between the thumb and the index finger.

• Encourage your child to try swirling and moving natural objects (e.g., leaves, pebbles, acorns, seashells), common objects (e.g., brushes, sponges, craft sticks, string), or their fingers in a variety of directions through paint. Small muscles are getting quite a work-



out while sorting, picking up, scooping, gripping, clutching and mixing.

- Have your child manipulate pliable materials such as play clay, which he or she can pound, poke, pat, pinch, roll, press, pull, push, stretch and cut while creatively expressing ideas. Wrist stability is practiced while using the palm of the hand to flatten the clay into pancake shapes.

- For a messy but memorable experience, invite your child to shape water and sand into things such as roadways and rivers. Add toy vehicles and plastic figures to the creation. Sand and water play allows children to practice pouring, sifting, building and molding.

- Foster your child's use of fingers in each hand to practice tracing shapes and printing letters in the sand. These types of activities increase the dexterity that is essential for complex writing.

#### *Fine Motor Skills through Dramatic Play*

- Remember that play objects or props add a sense of realism to dramatic play episodes. For example, encourage your child to dress up in the role of a chef, cook or parent in a play kitchen containing pretend appliances, a sink, realistic sounds and lights, toy food, cooking utensils and tabletop settings.

- Help your child create a construction site or a woodworking shop by providing a child's toolbox filled with toy tools, pretend lumber, and construction blocks. The concept of building and creating is an inherent element in physical literacy.

- Playing fashion show with your child can be a great way to practice the fine motor skills involved in dressing. Set up a runway and audience of your child's favorite stuffed animals, action figures, or character toys and start the show.

#### *Fine Motor Skills through Ball Play*

- Give some thought to the selection of a ball that best fits your child's interest and level of development. The assortment of balls for children who are three to five years old varies in sizes, shapes, colors, weights, textures and materials. If your child is struggling to grasp a small-sized ball, a larger ball or ball with graspable features (e.g., large bumps, ridges) can be introduced to promote better control.

- Inflatable large vinyl balls may be too large for your child to manipulate, but they can offer a meaningful experience when they are slightly deflated. They roll more slowly and are easier to catch, grip and pick up. Children can identify the ball's color(s), compare and sort sizes, and describe how materials and textures feel.

- To make homemade balls with your child, try adding adhesive tape to crumbled newspaper or gift tissue paper. Knotted sport socks or even a torn pair of pantyhose tied in a ball shape and knotted offer memorable fine motor experiences. A positive outcome of physical literacy is that, as preschool children become more adept at catching and gripping a ball of their choice, their fine motor strength improves.

## Suggestions for Promoting Movement Concepts

Has your child ever hit his or her head on a table or run into a chair or other piece of furniture? If so, you have likely experienced your child getting very upset and then you needing to calm him or her down. Similar collisions occur on playgrounds when children bump, or even run, into other children, which can result in angry confrontations. Fortunately, you can help your child avoid these stressful situations by reinforcing movement concepts. Movement concepts are the knowledge children need to be physically literate, and the major movement concept children must grasp to move safely is spatial awareness. For instance, children must know the “boundaries” of the area around their body, which we call personal space. When moving, children must be respectful of other children’s personal space and not get too close to them.

*I’m a Safe Driver.* Have your child pretend to be a car and stand with his or her hands in front of the shoulders with palms facing forward — the hands represent the pretend bumpers of a car. When you say, “Green light,” your child is to move (walking to start) around the space without bumping into anyone or anything. You can add some obstacles to the area (such as cardboard boxes or laundry baskets) to add difficulty. You can challenge your child to move backward (reverse) through the area — hands can be put behind the body to represent the back bumpers of a car. When you say, “Red light,” your child must come to a quick stop.

*Levels Rhyme.* Teach your child the following rhyme to learn the three levels of movement — low, middle and high. Say each line one at a time while touching the corresponding body parts with your hands. Have your child repeat the movements and repeat each line back to you. Do this a few times until your child knows the rhyme by heart.

From our knees to our toes, that’s the level we call *low*.

From our shoulders to the sky, that’s the level we call *high*.

From our knees to our shoulders is no riddle, that’s the level we call *middle*.

*Any things you have in your home that your child can safely move over, under, around and through (such as a table, a chair, pillows and/or your legs) can serve to make an obstacle course that will help your child practice spatial awareness. Use yarn or string to construct a laser field throughout the house. Create a web of high and low strung yarn for your child to step over, duck under, and dodge as they navigate their way from start to finish.*

*Statue Making.* Once your child learns the Levels Rhyme, encourage him or her to make different shapes with his or her body at each of the levels. Invite your child to be creative by saying, “We are going to have our own art museum here in the house. Let’s see what kinds of statues (body shapes) we can make at each of the three levels.” Make a statue (body shape) at each level, and have your child make the same statue. Next, invite your child to create the statues and you match his or her shapes.

*Moving Like the Animals.* Another way to have your child practice moving at the three levels is by tapping into his or her fascination with living creatures. Excite your child by asking him or her to show you how different animals move, such as a snake (low), leopard (middle), and giraffe (high). Ask your child what level he or she is moving at for each animal. Add to the fun by having your child make the sounds of the animals while moving.

*Playful Pathways.* Using a 10- to 12-foot piece of clothesline, have your child make the three pathways of movement (straight, curved and zig-zag) on the floor. An alternative to the clothesline is to have your child draw the pathways on the ground using colored chalk. After your child makes a pathway, have him or her perform different locomotor movements (e.g., walk, skip and gallop) alongside the pathway/clothesline, finishing where he or she started. Play Follow the Leader with your child, with the leader calling out what movement to do along each pathway. (Modification: Children who are developing their gait can utilize extra support by arranging the clothesline next to a wall or rail they can touch or hold on to for stabilization. Children using mobility devices [e.g., wheelchair, walker, cane] will need additional space to navigate on either side of the clothesline. In this case the clothesline should be set up in an open room with limited physical barriers.)

*Laser Field.* Any things you have in your home that your child can safely move over, under, around and through (such as a table, a chair, pillows and/or your legs) can serve to make an obstacle course that will help your child practice spatial awareness. Use yarn or string to construct a laser field throughout the house. Create a web of high and low strung yarn for your child to step over, duck under, and dodge as they navigate their way from start to finish.

*Making a Parent Archway.* Make your body into an arch with your hands and feet on the ground, or place your hands against a wall. Have your child travel through the arch. With a group of children, two children can work together to make an arch while other children pass through, and then children switch roles. (Modification: For children using mobility devices, parents can use pool noodles or string to create larger archways, allowing more room for movement.)

## Suggestions for Promoting Locomotor Skills

Locomotor skills involve large muscle movements and are used by children to go from one place to another. The eight major locomotor skills are walking, running, leaping, galloping, sliding, jumping, hopping and skipping. Parents are also encouraged to have their children perform locomotor skills that may not be as common, such as marching, tramping and waddling, which are movements children enjoy doing, particularly when parents engage children’s imagination by saying things such as “Show me how you can waddle fast like a penguin.”

*Going to the Zoo.* Announce to your child that the family is going on an imaginary trip to the zoo. Talk with your child about the types of animals that are at a zoo and the distinctive characteristics of those animals. Have your child pretend to move like

**Table 1.**  
**Monthly Movement Calendar**

Skipping	Prancing	Chasing	Running
Hopping	Tumbling	Jumping	Galloping
Strutting	Twisting	Turning	Trotting
Throwing	Catching	Rolling	Kicking
Tip-Toeing	Balancing	Stretching	Bending
Waddling	Dodging	Marching	Wiggling
Bouncing	Shuffling	Crawling	Stamping
Plodding	Wandering	Searching	Slithering
Sliding	Flying	Scurrying	Sneaking

the animals: chicken (low walk), monkey (leap from one branch to another), racehorse (gallop), kangaroo (jump), elephant (slow walk with arm acting as a swinging trunk), giraffe (walking tall on tippy toes), rabbit (small jumps), crab (sideways crab walk), and cheetah (fast run, long jump).

For practice with the alphabet (*Alphabet Zoo*), include your child's name in the following story, "At the Alphabet Zoo, (your child's name) saw Apes swinging, Bees buzzing about, Camels plodding along, and Ducks flying at a high level." Continue through the alphabet having your child demonstrate all animal movements (e.g., Zebras galloping).

*Walk This Way.* With your child, create a small obstacle course in the yard or inside. Be sure to include obstacles that your child (and you) can move over, around and through. You can create different pathways (straight, curved, zig-zag) or ask your child to create a path through the obstacle course. Your child can be the leader and you are the follower. Encourage creative movement. Next, ask him or her to follow you through the course. You can use different directions (forward, sideways, backward) and speeds (slow, fast). If your child enjoys it, time the movement and see if he or she can go faster without touching any objects.

*Move This Way.* Take the "obstacle" approach from Walk This Way and now encourage your child to use a variety of other locomotor movements such as running, galloping, sliding, skipping and jumping. The obstacle course you create may need a larger area so that you can add obstacles for your child to climb on and jump off of. Ensure safety by making sure the obstacles are low and that there is a soft terrain for landing. Play leader and follower through the course. Some options for obstacles are ropes to walk on or alongside, boxes to jump off of or climb onto, and plastic water bottles to run in between like traffic cones.

*Jump and Hopscotch.* With your child, use sidewalk chalk to draw a series of eight boxes on the ground for a traditional hopscotch pattern. Have your child write one number in each box from 1 to 8. First have your child focus on jumping (2 feet together or apart) from one box to the next and back to the starting box. Let your child create his or her own pattern, still focused only on jumping. Next, have your child leap through the boxes using only 1 foot per box and creating a pattern. Finally, have your child jump and hop through the boxes, which is "hopscotch." Show your child different patterns, such as going from a jump to a hop and back to a jump, then to hopping only. Encourage your child to announce the numbers upon landing. Letters could also be written in the boxes to work on spelling.

*Sailor, Can I Cross?* This is a game that is best played with a group of children and adults outside on a playground or in a backyard. The objective of the game is for players to cross the play area from one side to the other without getting tagged by the sailor in the middle. If a person gets tagged, that person also becomes a sailor. An adult begins each round of the game by saying the following rhyme for the children, or by saying the rhyme with the children, "Sailor, can I cross, yes or no? What do I have to pay, a lot of dough? No, no, all you have to do is move like this \_\_\_\_\_." The sailor announces a movement skill the players must perform to get across — for example, running, walking, sliding, galloping, jumping, leaping, skipping, walking backward, or rolling like a log. Each round a sailor announces a different movement skill to perform. Once the game is down to one person who has not been tagged, that person can be the first sailor for the next round.

*Read, Run, and Race About.* Select a favorite action storybook and encourage your child to mimic the actions and expressions of the characters as the story is read aloud.

*Movement of the Day.* Use a large monthly calendar and ask your child to assist you in filling each day with a different movement skill (see Table 1). The child crosses off the box each day once the skill is practiced and completed.

## Suggestions for Promoting Nonlocomotor Skills

Nonlocomotor skills involve movements such as stretching, turning, swaying, twisting and spinning the body, as well as balancing on one or more body parts. Compared to locomotor movements, which involve traveling from one place to another, nonlocomotor skills are usually done in personal space. The preschool years are when children build their "movement vocabulary" of nonlocomotor skills. So when you play the following games with your child, be sure to announce the names of the nonlocomotor movements, and have your child repeat the names several times.

*My Secret Garden.* Tell the story of a special child named (your child's name) who had a secret garden no one knew about. In this garden, (your child's name) planted all sorts of beautiful flowers, plants and trees. Talk with your child about specific types of flowers he or she would plant in the garden. Next, have your child pretend to make his or her body into a seed for one of flowers you talked about. Pretend to hold a watering can over your child, and say that with sun and water the flower begins to grow: "Show me what your seed would look like as it begins to grow." Continue to encourage your child to move his or her body to depict the seed growing into a tall and mature flower with shoots (arms stretched out) and petals (palms turned up to sky and fingers spread). Now ask your child how the flower would move if a strong wind came (e.g., swaying and twisting movements). To have your child practice whirling movements, ask your child to show you how a group of petals (or leaves from a tree) would move if they fell and were caught in a swift whirling breeze.

*Shake-Shake-Shake.* Begin by calling out one body part at a time and have your child shake it (e.g., foot, leg, hips, arm, and head). Next, call out two parts and have your child shake both at the same time (e.g., one leg and one arm, both arms, both legs, hips and arms). Whenever you call "Shake-Shake-Shake," your child must shake the whole body.

*Shadow Play.* For this activity you will need a flashlight (e.g., flashlight on a cellphone) and a plain smooth wall in a darkened room. Have your child stand between you and the wall. Invite your



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child to pose with his or her hands near the wall. Shine the flashlight on the hands to create a shadow. Encourage your child to wiggle and move hands, fingers, arms and legs to create different shadows. Have your child use other movements such as shaking, stretching, ducking and swaying.

**Body-part Balances.** Tap into your child’s creativity by challenging him or her to show you balances using different body parts. For example, say, “Show me a balance on four body parts.” Have your child explore the body parts to use rather than telling him or her. To engage your child’s thinking, say “Now show me a

different balance on four body parts.” Repeat the same prompts for three body parts, two body parts, and one body part. At the end ask your child what his or her favorite balances were, and then do those balances along with your child.

**I Can Pretend to Be a ...** In this imagination game your child will do all sorts of nonlocomotor movements (e.g., bending, reaching, pushing, pulling) that relate to different types of work. Have your child start by saying to you, “I can pretend to be a...” and then complete the sentence with the following descriptions:

- Firefighter gripping a heavy firehose and spraying water to fight a fire.
- Pizza maker tossing pizza dough in the air, then catching and stretching the dough.
- Carpenter using a hammer to pound nails into wood.
- Hairstylist or barber cutting hair with scissors.
- Gardener digging a hole, planting a seed, covering the seed with dirt, and watering the seed.

Now ask your child, “Who else can you pretend to be?” “What job would you do?” and “Please show me.”

**Animal Balances.** Here is an opportunity to connect your child’s natural interest in animals and how they move with the skill of balancing. Call out the following animal balances and have your child perform each. As an alternative, you could first show each balance and then have your child do the same.

- Stork standing on one foot.
- Bear walking on hind legs.
- Turtle balancing on the edge of a rock.
- Cobra with arched back.
- Eagle perched on a tree branch

Now say, “Show me what other animal balances you can make and I will guess what animals you are making and do the balances with you.”

## Suggestions for Promoting Manipulative Skills

Manipulative skills are used by children to move objects, such as a balloon or beach ball, with the hands, feet, or a piece of equipment. Common manipulative skills include throwing, underhand rolling, catching, dribbling, kicking, and striking a ball with a bat.

**Balloon Body Juggling.** Toss a balloon into the air over your child’s head and call out the part of the body to be used to strike it (e.g., knee, foot, head, elbow, wrist) before it reaches the floor. You can also play *Keep It Up* with your child by taking turns striking the balloon into the air with a body part that your child suggests.

**Tissue Toss.** Using a facial tissue (Kleenex) or handkerchief, toss the tissue and have your child catch it with both hands. To teach catching, have your child make moose antlers with his or her hands and put the antlers on his or her head. This will teach your child to keep hands open and positioned ready to grasp. Hold the tissue by a corner when tossing. A more challenging option for your child would be to catch with one hand. An alternative is to have your child do both the tossing and the catching.

**Laundry-basket Target Practice.** Have your child practice underhand throwing by tossing an object into a laundry basket; even

a rolled-up sock can serve as a nice soft object for your child to throw. To create a larger object to grasp, several pairs of socks can be rolled together. Make a game for your child out of cleaning up his or her room by having your child underhand-toss dirty clothes and other objects into the basket. The basket can be placed closer or farther away to accommodate your child's abilities.

**Bowling Bonanza.** Tell your child you are going on an imaginary trip to the bowling alley. Collect used paper-towel rolls or recyclable plastic water bottles for bowling pins. Your child can use a playground ball or inflated beach ball for rolling with both hands. Several pairs of socks rolled up together, as described earlier, will allow a child to roll with one hand. Have your child count the number of pins that he or she knocks down per turn to work on math skills. (Modification: If your child does not have the ability to roll the ball, a ramp can be built using a flattened cardboard box. Cut the cardboard box to create the longest piece possible. Tape one end of the opened box to a table or elevated surface, and tape the other side to the ground. Your child can use this ramp to bowl while practicing grasping.)

**Batter Up.** Play T-ball together with your child, encouraging him or her to put the bat down after striking the ball and then running the bases. This is a great activity to do with the entire family or at playdates and parties. Use cones or hula hoops to show where the bases are, and limit the distance between the bases. Your child will use locomotor, nonlocomotor and manipulative skills in this one activity. Encourage game play by letting your child run and catch without worrying about making outs. Practicing the different skills in a game-like manner should be the focus rather than learning official rules. This game can also be used to focus on kicking (*Kick Ball*). Have your child kick a stationary ball (such as a beach ball), then run the bases.

## Developing Physical Literacy Also Requires Limiting Children's Sedentary Behaviors

As you use the activities in this article to improve your child's physical literacy, you will also be helping him or her reach the recommended daily amount of physical activity for preschoolers. The present recommendations are for preschool-age children to accumulate at least 60 minutes of structured physical activity (planned and instructed by a parent or teacher) and at least 60 minutes — and up to several hours — of unstructured physical activity (child-initiated physical play) each day.

Reducing the amount of time your child spends being sedentary, such as sitting to watch television and playing video or computer games, is just as important for the development of physical literacy as it is to provide your child with opportunities for physical activity. It is recommended that preschoolers not be sedentary for more than 60 minutes at a time, except when sleeping. In addition, parents are advised to limit preschoolers' total entertainment (non-educational) screen time to no more than two hours per day, and no screen time is recommended for children under the age of two. Below are a few suggestions to help reduce children's sedentary behaviors.

- Avoid putting television sets and Internet connections in your child's bedroom.
- Invite your child to assist you with food preparation at mealtimes, and use the occasions to talk about the importance of eating nutritious foods.
- Establish household routines that involve physical movement, such as taking out the trash and cleaning-related chores.
- Use a stroller for your child only when necessary.

## Frequently Asked Questions

*Must I be an expert on physical activity to help my child develop physical literacy?*

No, you do not need any formal training to help your child develop physical literacy. The most important thing is that your child sees that you enjoy movement and want to be physically active with him or her. The suggestions offered here will help you with the rest.

*Can my child practice movement skills indoors?*

Yes, your child can practice certain movement skills inside. Children can develop spatial awareness skills indoors by moving on their hands and knees or walking. Having your child practice something like running is best done outdoors. For indoors, ensure that there are no hard and sharp objects in the path of where your child will move, and perhaps reposition furniture to the sides of a room to create a space for movement.

*What can I do to help ensure my child is safe while practicing movement skills?*

Ensure that the area where your child will move does not have any hard or sharp objects that prevent active movement.

*What is the best way to teach my child a new motor skill?*

The easiest way is to first verbally define the skill for the child — for example, "Rolling means turning your body over and over." Then place the word in a sentence for the child to understand it better (e.g., "Remember when we saw the little boy roll the ball at the pins?"). Some parents also enjoy physically demonstrating the skill for the child. Other examples of this could be, "When we *curl* our body we form a round shape," followed by, "Small dogs curl their bodies into little round shapes," or, "When we *reach* we stretch upward or outward with our hands," followed by saying, "The little girl tried to reach up in the closet for her toy."

Every child has a different learning style. Each child processes information in their individual way and at their own pace. To break down motor skills, here are some suggestions that can be used while teaching. The first step is to provide a verbal explanation of the skill (e.g., "To throw the ball, we step and then throw"). After telling your child what he or she will learn, model the skill for your child (e.g., "Watch me throw the ball into the basket. I'm stepping, and now I throw!"). If your child has difficulty comprehending verbal instructions, modeling and providing hand-over-hand assistance will be an effective way to teach motor skills.

*How does physical activity affect a child's physical development?*

Even short bouts of vigorous outdoor play can enhance your child's muscle growth. It can also stimulate the growth of the child's heart and lungs and other vital organs. Increased cardiorespiratory activity also increases the function of the fundamental nervous centers of the child's brain for clearer thought.

*What is the right amount of physical activity each day for preschool-age children?*

Children benefit most from frequent blocks of movement time throughout the day. Preschoolers should accumulate at least 60 minutes of structured physical activity (planned and instructed by a parent or teacher) and at least

## Table 2. Glossary of Terms

**Body Awareness:** A child's understanding of the different parts of the body, and the ability to control the movement of body parts and to sense the position of body parts when performing a movement.

**Fine Motor Skills:** Physical skills that focus on the use of the fingers and hands, such as digging with a small shovel, rolling and stretching clay, and tracing shapes or writing letters in the sand.

**Fundamental Movement Skills:** The physical skills that children should learn in childhood in order to be physically literate and active for a lifetime, including fine motor skills, locomotor skills, nonlocomotor skills, and manipulative skills.

**Levels of Movement:** The three main heights at which children move their bodies in relation to the ground — low, middle and high.

**Locomotor Skills:** Physical skills used to go from one place to another, including walking, running, leaping, galloping, sliding, jumping, hopping and skipping.

**Manipulative Skills:** Physical skills used to move an object with the hands, feet or with a piece of equipment, including such skills as throwing, catching, kicking and striking a ball with a bat.

**Movement Concepts:** The major ideas that children must understand in order to move safely around other people and objects. Spatial awareness is one major movement concept children must grasp to move safely.

**Nonlocomotor Skills:** Physical skills that involve stretching, turning, swaying, twisting and spinning the body, as well as balancing on one or more body parts. These skills are usually done in personal space.

**Pathways of Movement:** The three basic pathways children may follow when travelling using locomotor movements are: straight, curved and zig-zag.

**Physical Activity:** Movement experiences children engage in that result in energy expenditure beyond what children do when just sitting or standing still.

**Physical Literacy:** The ability to move with competence and confidence in a wide variety of physical activities in multiple environments that benefit the healthy development of the whole person.

**Physical Play:** Child-initiated movement experiences that involve physical activity, as compared to other types of play activities that require little movement, such as sitting down to draw a picture or to color.

**Sedentary Behaviors:** Activities children do that require little to no energy expenditure, such as sitting or lying down to watch television, play a video game, or use a computer.

**Spatial Awareness:** A child's ability to be aware of the position of his or her own body and its different parts when moving around other people and things. Personal space, general space, and safely moving over, under and around objects are all important aspects of spatial awareness.

**Structured Physical Activity:** Movement experiences for children that are planned and instructed by a parent, teacher or other care provider.

**Unstructured Physical Activity:** Movement experiences that are freely chosen by children based on their interests.

60 minutes — and up to several hours — of unstructured physical activity (child-initiated physical play) each day.

### *Can physical literacy increase my child's cognitive ability?*

There is strong evidence that increased language development can occur as the child physically interacts with others, takes turns, gives a rationale for his or her play preferences, and verbally expresses his or her desires during sessions of role play.

### *Can my child learn academic concepts from playing outdoors?*

While it is difficult to be certain how much outdoor play influences the minds of adult innovators, early learning can occur in

engineering and science when children build dams and rivers in sandboxes or obtain an understanding of the laws of physics (i.e., speed, motion, force, gravity, tension, and angles) by manipulating handheld toys.

### *How can I tell if my child is making progress?*

Motor skill development takes time and practice, and progress is not always immediately observable. Give your child several opportunities to learn and succeed over the course of a few weeks. Make a video of your child's abilities before you start working on motor skills. This will provide you with a reference to see changes over time. If no or minimal progress is a cause for concern, contact

### Table 3. Resources

Free information and articles to learn more about physical literacy:  
<http://www.shapeamerica.org/events/physicalliteracy.aspx>

Free movement calendars:

- <http://www.shapeamerica.org/uploads/teachersToolbox/earlyChildhood/ECRevisedcalendar.pdf> (English)
- <http://www.shapeamerica.org/uploads/teachersToolbox/earlyChildhood/ECSpanishRevisedCalendar.pdf> (Spanish)

Free movement activities for you and your child: <http://www.shapeamerica.org/standards/guidelines/early-childhood-resources.aspx>

Publications about promoting children's movement offered by SHAPE America – Society of Health and Physical Educators:

- *Active Start: A Statement of Physical Activity Guidelines for Children from Birth to Age 5* (2nd ed.)
- *Appropriate Practices in Movement Programs for Young Children Ages 3–5*
- *101 Tips for Increasing Physical Activity in Early Childhood*

Publications about children's movement, learning and development:

- *Encouraging Physical Activity in Preschoolers* by Steve Sanders. Published by Gryphon House Inc.
- *Follow Me Too: A Handbook of Movement Activities for Three- to Five-Year-Olds* by Marianne Torbert and Lynne Schneider. Published by Dale Seymour Publications/Pearson Learning Group

The U.S. National Physical Activity Guidelines: <https://health.gov/PAGuidelines/>

a medical professional for an evaluation. It is never too early to identify the possibility of motor skill delays that can be improved through early intervention.

*Do the physical activity recommendations apply to my child with a disability?*

Yes. Children with disabilities should also accumulate at least 60 minutes of structured physical activity directed by a parent or teacher and at least 60 minutes — and up to several hours — of unstructured child-initiated physical play per day.

*My child isn't grasping the motor skills I'm teaching. What do I do next?*

Continue working with your child. Sometimes progress does not show immediately. Your child may also qualify for early intervention services through your state under part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

*What is Part C of IDEA, and does my child qualify for it?*

Through Part C of IDEA, the federal government provides funding to states to provide comprehensive early intervention to infants and toddlers from birth through three years old. Contact your state representative or local agency to learn more (all states have services, but the overseeing agency varies by state).

*My child uses augmentative or alternative communication. How can I incorporate this into teaching motor skills?*

The way you communicate motor skills may be different if your child uses vocalizations, gestures or signs, communication boards, picture exchange communication systems (PECS), or a speech-generating device, but this should not prevent your child's

participation. In addition to your child's communication style, some options for teaching your child motor skills are to use physical modeling, video modeling, and hand-over-hand assistance. For each motor skill, you can demonstrate by modeling the action (e.g., demonstrate kicking a ball). A variety of motor skill videos can be found online. Finding videos depicting same-age peers allows for more effective learning as your child can relate to the model in the video. Finally, hand-over-hand assistance can be helpful in guiding your child through the correct movements of the motor skill.

*What are some examples of equipment I can adapt to help my child develop motor skills?*

There are endless adaptations that can be made to equipment. Throwing and kicking tasks can be modified by providing different sized and textured balls. Other equipment can be adapted by adding foam noodles to allow for a larger surface area to grip (e.g., on a pencil, bat, racket, or other similar implements).

See Table 2 for a glossary of terms and Table 3 for additional resources.

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### References

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