

## Physical development

A child's growth flows as a continuous process, a gradual move from one stage of development to another. For example, one must walk before they can run. Physical development refers to a child's ability to move, coordinate and control their body. This development can be broken up into two categories:

- gross motor skills- controlling large parts of the body; arms and legs.
- fine motor skills- coordinating small body parts, hands, and fingers

### **Why is physical development important?**

Children have high levels of energy that need to be expended, and the benefits of physical activity are critical to a child's physical and mental growth. Children who are physically active tend to do better in school, have longer attention spans, and have fewer behavioural problems.

Being physically active also helps children to:

- Develop strong bones
- Develop gross and fine motor skills
- Build strength, endurance, and flexibility
- Build confidence
- Achieve and maintain a healthy weight
- Decrease stress levels and improve well-being
- Improve social skills
- Improve balance and coordination
- Improve posture
- Read
- Write
- Improve concentration
- Improve sleep

Lack of or not enough physical activity can lead to several health issues for young children. A lack of exercise can lead to weight gain or excessive body fat, high blood pressure, bone health problems, and cardiovascular diseases. Active children tend to have fewer chronic health issues, are less likely to get ill, and have a greatly reduced risk of developing diseases or illnesses such as diabetes, heart disease, and depression.

Being physically active now will benefit children throughout their lives, so integrating exercise into a young child's everyday routine is crucial.

Without a solid foundation of gross and fine motor control and experience of moving in different ways, children will struggle with the other areas of learning. A strong foundation in Physical development lays the grounding for all future learning.

Children should be allowed to engage in 'risky play'. This does not mean allowing them to participate in potentially dangerous activities. Instead, it means encouraging them to push their limits and extend their abilities in a controlled environment. What is risky play to one child might not be risky play to another, however. Encourage children to take ownership of their own safety. Of course, we keep an eye on them and we know our students well enough to understand their physical limitations

and when we need to step in. However, we do encourage the children to push the boundaries of what they can do. We try to refrain from saying 'Be careful', as this can instil fear in children and highlight our lack of trust in their own judgements. Instead, we try to use phrases such as:

- Take your time
- What is your next move?
- Which part of your body might you bump if you do that?
- Do you feel stable?
- Do you feel safe there?
- I am here if you need me.

Using such phrases allows children to develop their awareness of their surroundings. Engaging in risky play is a great way for children to practise problem-solving skills.

### **How can I encourage physical development?**

Pre-schoolers should spend at least 180 minutes (3 hours) a day doing a variety of physical activities spread throughout the day, including active and outdoor play. The more the better.

The 180 minutes should include at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity. All children under who are overweight can improve their health by meeting the activity guidelines, even if their weight does not change.

Parents can foster healthy growth by providing opportunities to practice new skills as well as promoting healthy eating habits during these important childhood years.

Below are 10 ideas to help you develop your child's Personal, Social and Emotional skills, to play around with and to explore the limitless possibilities. They do not contain specific instructions or predetermined outcomes so are all very open-ended. Have fun! Do please share your experiences with us on Tapestry!

***"Storytelling is the most powerful way to put ideas into the world"***

*-Robert McKee*

### **Active stories**



Active stories and games build motor skills while encouraging imagination, creativity, and language skills. Active stories could be based on:

- Animals – in the wild or at the zoo.
- Everyday activities – e.g., cleaning the house or going shopping.
- Adventures – e.g., pirates on the high seas or astronauts going to the moon.

- Fantasy – from fairies and princesses, to knights and dragons.
- The weather – the different seasons and elements.
- Familiar tales – look for inspiration in children’s favourite books.

You can incorporate any move or skill you want to into your stories. For example, on a jungle adventure, you could bend under branches, wiggle out of brambles, jump over streams, gallop up the hill, roll down the other side, stretch up to reach for the squirrels, leap from steppingstone to steppingstone in the river and then creep through the bushes.

You can also create stories with help and suggestions from your child. Ask them questions such as:

- What animal shall we be today? (E.g., tiger)
- Where do we live? (E.g., jungle)
- What do we like to do? (E.g., climb trees, run up the hill, etc.)
- What do we eat?

***“Music and rhythm find their way into the secret places of the soul”***  
**-Plato**

### **Music, Dancing and singing**



Sing together or find recordings of songs that have children moving their bodies in different ways. Hokey coky, Shake My Sillies Out, I am A Little Teapot, and dingle, dangle scarecrow are all examples of fun ways to get children moving and shaking to sing along songs. One of our favourites at preschool is ‘Banana, banana meatball. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BQ9q4U2P3ig>

If you play your child’s favourite song, it is guaranteed to make their body move! Dancing promotes cooperation and increases flexibility and stamina. Encourage your child to invent their own dances and give them props such as colourful dance scarves, pom-poms or wands to inspire their creativity even further!

Select music that changes tempo such as a favourite nursery rhyme or piece of classical music. Encourage children to move to the tempo and volume levels (faster with faster tempos, reaching high if music is loud or high-pitched, and low if music is soft or low-pitched).

Once children have grasped the concept of moving to the music, add in skills, for example:

- skip when a particular sound is made, and wiggle when a different sound is made, etc.
- skip faster or slower depending on the tempo, etc.

***“There are no extra pieces in the universe. Everyone is here because he or she has a place to fill, and every piece must fit itself into the big jigsaw puzzle”.***

*-Deepak Chopra*

## **Blocks, Jigsaws, and Shape Sorters**

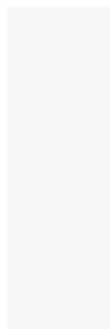


Playing with blocks, jigsaws, and shape sorters all lay the foundations of spatial thinking, logical reasoning, ordering, and recognising various shapes, sizes, and colours all whilst developing a child’s fine and gross motor skills. Use a supply of blocks, containers with lids, or another similar, stackable object to build a tower with your child. Take turns adding blocks or containers to the tower and see how high your child can stack them. You can count the number of stacked items together, and then when the tower is complete, your child can knock it down. Discover shape and pattern in puzzles and shape sorters whilst developing your child’s finger and hand muscles.

***“Exercise is the key not only to physical health but to peace of mind.”***

*- Nelson Mandela*

## **Catching, throwing, and kicking**



Balls are a staple for so many games and activities. Using different types and sizes of balls, have your child see how far they can kick, or play goalie in front of a wall or fence and see if your child can kick the ball past you. Catching and throwing activities help to improve your child’s hand-eye

coordination, motor skills and timing. There are countless throwing and catching games that you can try with your child, such as throwing balls through hoops, shooting in basketball and netball games, hitting a target with bean bags in a throwing game, catching bean bags, large balls or small balls, or aiming an object at a large target or set of cans.

**“Skipping is a form of flying”**

-Jessi Lane Adams

## Skipping

Skipping is a fun activity which improves your child’s heart rate, coordination, and agility. Encourage your child to try different skipping games, such as jumping with a partner, running through the rope, or jumping for height!

***“In every walk with nature, one receives far more than he seeks”.***

-John Muir

## Walking



Walking is a simple activity that not only increases physical development, but also enhances your child’s mental health as well. Whether it is walking to preschool, power walking to the shops or walking through nature, make sure you get your child out and about to promote physical activity. If it has been a rainy day, take the opportunity to jump in, out, and over puddles!

***“Life is like riding a bicycle. To keep your balance you must keep moving”.***

-Albert Einstein

## Ride a Bike



Whether it is a tricycle, a balance bike, a bike with training wheels, or a two-wheeler, kids love to zoom around under their own steam. Enhance your child's play by pretending to fill their bike with petrol and talk about mathematical concepts such as money.

***"Life is more fun if you play games."  
- Roald Dahl***

## Games



Games such as;

- 'Simon says' - Stand in front of your child and tell them to watch you carefully and copy your moves.
- 'Hit the balloon'- Encourage your child to keep a balloon from touching the ground by hitting it with their hands.
- Feather catch-Take feathers and toss them into the air for children to catch with their hands or in containers before they reach the ground.
- Bubble fun-Use various sizes and types of bubble wands and have kids blow their own bubbles or blow them yourself and have kids chase and pop them.
- Animal walk- Inside or out, encourage your child to slither like a snake, hop like a frog, gallop like a horse, or walk like a bear on all fours.
- Hide and Seek- Children hide either themselves or objects such as their stuffed animals in this favourite game played by children around the world.

***"Only those who will risk going too far can possibly find out how far they can go."  
- T.S. Eliot***

## Running, Jumping, Climbing, Swinging



Young children have a compulsion to move. Allowing them to do so, and providing safe and age-appropriate challenges, allows them to increase their confidence as well as develop their resilience through risk-taking. Of course, gross motor skills also receive a mighty boost.

***“Artists are just children who refuse to put down their crayons”.***  
— Al Hirschfeld

## Drawing and Painting



Letting children run wild with paints and drawing tools allows them to experience their world in a sensory way and develop self-expression, whilst also developing pre-writing skills. Furthermore, it is an invitation to learn about colours, mixing and good-old tidying up!

Remember, just as with other areas of development different children will develop different skills at different stages but if you are worried about your child’s physical development then do talk to us.

Further resources

[Disney Shake Up Games | 10 Minute Shake Up | Change4Life \(www.nhs.uk\)](#)

[Yasmine Yogi and Phoebe Bee - Yoga, Mindful Exercises and Breathing Exercises for Children: Yoga, Mindful Exercises and Breathing Exercises for Children : Routledge, Kath: Amazon.co.uk: Books](#)