

The Importance of Physical Activity

The Christmas holidays may have been very different for families this year. Many of you will have remained at home with less opportunity for physical play. As we enter into the new year it is important to recognise how important physical activity is for children’s physical and mental wellbeing.

We know physical skills are important because they underpin all areas of children’s leaning and development. They help children to develop:



- Social skills and relationships
- Healthy lifestyles and maintain a healthy weight
- Muscle and bone strength
- Balance, control and coordination
- Body and brain connections supporting all areas of learning
- Understand new words
- Ability to plan and sequence
- Positive mental health and wellbeing
- Positive behaviour
- Improved sleep

In the current Lockdown situation, it is even more important to be active to support our children’s mental health and well-being, learning and development and future life outcomes.

Here are just a few ideas for you:

Top Tips	Practical ideas
<p><b>Provide time and space</b> Spinning, twisting and turning, rolling and running are movements your child will naturally want to explore</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Spend lots of time playing in the garden</li> <li>- Go for a walk</li> <li>- Encourage your child to move freely and explore movements spontaneously</li> <li>- Roll down a hill and climb on logs</li> <li>- Run up and down a slope</li> <li>- Just dance – put on some music and have a family boogie!</li> </ul>
<p><b>Give children lots of opportunities to play on the floor or be on their tummy</b> Consider completing fun games on the floor. Lying on their tummy helps your child strengthen their core muscles and will support later skills such as reading and writing</p>	<p>Try getting them to lie on their tummy to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Complete puzzles</li> <li>- Play with cars and trains</li> <li>- Small world toys</li> <li>- Card games such as snap</li> <li>- Board games</li> <li>- Sharing books</li> <li>- Simply just rolling around !</li> <li>- Pretend to be a snake (or even a wiggly worm!) and pretend to slither along the floor</li> </ul>

<p><b>Provide opportunities for children to walk, jump and hop</b>          These movements will help support your child's balance, control and coordination</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Using chalk drawn zig zag lines/spots/swirly lines to follow</li> <li>- Hopscotch on the patio</li> <li>- Personal favourite – jump on bubble wrap!!</li> <li>- Go for a walk around the block and jump over the cracks in the pavement</li> <li>- Jump in puddles!</li> <li>- Put on some heavy Rock (or any other music of choice for that matter!) and jump, skip and gallop in time to the music!!</li> </ul>
<p><b>Sing action Rhymes</b>          Action rhymes will support sequencing, language development and physical skills such as coordination</p>	<p>Examples of well known action songs are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Head, shoulders knees and toes</li> <li>- Hokey cokey</li> <li>- Wind the Bobbin up</li> <li>- Wheels on the Bus</li> </ul> <p>Songs which encourage finger strengthening</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 1,2,3,4,5 once I caught a fish alive</li> <li>- 5 little ducks</li> </ul> <p>There is a huge list of action songs out there – if you are stuck drop Jacqui an email and she will send you some!</p>
<p><b>Get children's arms, wrists, hands and fingers moving</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Make playdough</li> <li>- Pop bubble wrap in your fingers</li> <li>- Cleaning with sponges</li> <li>- Mop the floor</li> <li>- Sweeping</li> <li>- Spray bottles, jugs and bottles in the bath</li> <li>- Make a cake with lots of mixing</li> <li>- Puzzles</li> <li>- Thread penne pasta on a string to make a necklace</li> <li>- Posting pennies or buttons into a homemade box with a slit</li> <li>- Play catch with a ball</li> <li>- Digging!</li> </ul>
<p><b>Create opportunities for children to help push, pull or carry heavy objects</b>          These activities can often help children feel calmer and more focused, they will support muscle development and balance</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Digging in the garden</li> <li>- Help with the shopping</li> <li>- Carry a rucksack containing some weight e.g. a few toys, on a walk</li> <li>- Wheelbarrow walking</li> <li>- Make an obstacle course with cushions and blankets</li> <li>- Make a den outside perhaps even using branches</li> </ul>
<p><b>Encourage crawling</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Crawl through tunnels</li> <li>- Crawl over cushions and under blankets</li> </ul>

<p>Even for older children, crawling is a great activity as it gets the whole body and brain working together. This is important for later skills such as sequencing and ordering</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Crawl under tables and chairs</li> <li>- Crawl whilst playing with cars and trains</li> <li>- Pretend to be an animal</li> </ul>
<p><b>Reduce the amount of time your child is still</b></p>	<p>Although we all recognise that both you and the children need some downtime – particularly at the moment – it is still important to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reduce screentime</li> <li>- When on a device or watching TV encourage children to lie on their tummys. Also talk to your child whilst they are watching or playing a game – combining these two things will help support core strength and language.</li> <li>- Ensure your child has much opportunity to move feely on the floor</li> <li>- Restrict time in pushchairs</li> </ul>
<p><b>Encourage sensory /messy play</b> This helps children to understand and explore different textures: wet, sticky crumbly, stretchy, cold, hard, soft etc</p>	<p>There are lots of ideas for messy play – if you are unsure or need more ideas just ask Jacqui</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Playdough</li> <li>- Cornflour and water</li> <li>- Dry and wet pasta</li> <li>- Shaving foam</li> <li>- Freeze toys in ice</li> <li>- Jelly</li> </ul>

Additional ideas to support physical play can be found here:

- Sport NZ contains brochures providing a variety of fun activities to get little children moving (<https://sportnz.org.nz/managing-sport/search-for-a-resource/guides/active-movement-activity-guidesfor-children-0-5-years->)
- Practical ideas for physical activities to help with babies and young children’s physical development. Helping under-5s live active and healthy lives — Early Movers
- National Centre for Sport and Exercise Medicine contains leaflets on ‘Help your baby move and play everyday’ and ‘Help your child move and play every day’ ([www.ncsem-em.org.uk/resources/agegroups/early-years/](http://www.ncsem-em.org.uk/resources/agegroups/early-years/))



- There are also lots of physical activity activities for young children on CBBC, Youtube and Cbeebies e.g. Mr Tumble action Rhymes, Joe Wicks workout.

