

Active Play with a Purpose

Active Play

Purposeful active play supports a child's gross motor development, a significant part of overall growth and well-being. When child care providers and their environments intentionally promote physical activity, a child develops **gross motor** and **fundamental movement** skills.

Benefits of Active Play

Consistent, daily active play is important for young children for many reasons:

- Develops physical fitness
- Teaches fundamental movement skills
- Promotes cognitive learning and brain development
- Builds confidence
- Leads to interaction with the environment
- Prevents obesity and related diseases



DID YOU KNOW?

Kinesthetic Learners

Most young children are "kinesthetic" (or active) learners, meaning they learn best by carrying out physical activities (as opposed to learning by listening or watching). Make the most of this by teaching children about numbers, letters, colors, and shapes through active play (for example, count to 10 by jumping 10 times.)



Fundamental Movement Skills

Between the ages of 2-6 years, children are learning **fundamental movement skills** through active play. Fundamental movement skills are basic gross motor movements developed through practice. These skills are divided into three categories: **locomotor**, **object control**, and **stability**.

Why Teach Fundamental Movement in Child Care?

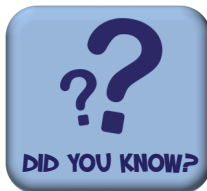
In general, the more skilled children are in fundamental movement skills, the more confident they will be in future physical activities, and the more likely they will be to choose to be active as they grow. Because children learn many of these skills before reaching kindergarten, child care providers play a key role in encouraging fundamental movement.

Examples of Fundamental Movement=

Locomotor: walking, running, jumping, hopping, galloping, skipping, leaping

Object Control: throwing, catching, kicking, striking, ball rolling, dribbling

Stability: turning, twisting, bending, stretching, reaching, lifting, falling



Phases of Motor Development

Fundamental Movement is actually the third phase of motor development.

1. **Reflexive Movement:** 0-4 months, first signs of controlled movement
2. **Rudimentary Movement:** Lasts until about age 2, and includes learning to roll over, sit up, pull to stand, take first few steps, etc.
3. **Fundamental Movement:** Occurs approximately between ages 2-6.
4. **Specialized Movement Phase:** Begins around age 7 and continues through rest of life. Fundamental movement skills are refined to play sports and active recreation.



Gross Motor & Fundamental Movement Milestones

The active games and lessons in this curriculum will help you support the development of gross motor skills. Encourage children to play and move in ways that support the development of emerging gross motor milestones. Use the following information to help you plan activities that are best for the children in your care, remembering that each child is unique and develops on individual timelines. *Source - Active Start: A statement of physical activity guidelines from birth to age 5, 2nd Ed (2009), www.shapeamerica.org, SHAPE America.*

Locomotor (Traveling) Milestones		
<i>Gross motor movements used to move from one place to another</i>		
2 to 3 Years	3 to 4 Years	4 to 5 Years
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Walks across room • Uses hurried walk • Walks backwards • Pushes a riding toy with feet • Marches around room • Walks up and down stairs alternating feet with help • Jumps in place, two feet together 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Run • Avoids obstacles and people while moving • Climbs up and down on playground equipment • Rides tricycle using pedals • Gallops, but not smoothly • Jumps over objects or off a step 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Runs smoothly • Jumps and spins • Marches • Moves through obstacle course • Gallops and skips with ease • Plays "Follow the Leader" using a variety of traveling movements • Plays games that requires jumping or kicking a ball
Object Control Milestones		
<i>Gross motor movements that are needed to use objects in a controlled manner</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carries a large ball while moving • Flings a beanbag • Throws a ball or other object by pushing it with both hands • Catches a large, bounced ball against the body with arms straight • Kicks a stationary ball 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Throws a ball or other object • Traps thrown ball against body (bending arms when catching) • Strikes a balloon or other object with a large paddle • Kicks ball forward by stepping or running up to it 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Steps forward to throw a ball • Catches a thrown ball with both hands • Dribbles a ball • Strikes a stationary ball • Bounces and catches a ball • Kicks moving ball while running
Stability Milestones		
<i>Gross motor movements used to maintain balance while changing body positions</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Squats to pick up toys • Stands on tiptoes to reach something • Gets in and out of adult chair • Kneels while playing • Straddles a taped line on the floor • Sidesteps across beam or sandbox edge 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Walks forward along sandbox edge watching feet • Jumps off low step, landing on two feet • Jumps over small objects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hops across the playground, hops on one foot then the other • Walks across beam or sandbox edge, forward and backward • Attempts to jump rope • Hops, skips or twirls around and stops without falling

Structured vs. Unstructured Active Play

Unstructured Active Play: Child-led active play (often called “free play”) that usually takes place outdoors or in a large indoor gross motor space (such as a gym), with toys and equipment that encourage children to play hard. The adult supervises and might encourage active play, but does not lead activities. This kind of play gives children the opportunity to practice creativity, self-expression, and cooperation.

Structured Active Play: Activity for children that is planned and led by an adult. Often called “adult-led active play,” this type of activity usually results in more children being moderately to vigorously active when compared to free play. All of the activities in this curriculum are examples of structured active play.

Benefits of Structured Active Play:

- Have clear goals for children
- Give all children the chance to be moderately to vigorously active
- Give children practice in fundamental movement skills
- Help children learn academic and social concepts

Many experts recommend that preschoolers have 60 minutes of structured physical activity and 60 minutes of unstructured physical activity every day (www.gonapsacc.org). Other national recommendations suggest that there should be at least two separate structured physical activity opportunities every day (*Caring for Our Children, Standard 3.1.3.1*).

Tips for Leading Structured Active Play

- Give brief instructions (less than 1 minute).
- Tell children about the activity AND show them what you want them to do
- Establish boundaries and routines, especially for starting and stopping (see Quick Tip below).
- Vary the activity frequently to keep children engaged.
- Have a “cool-down” activity to help children transition out of active play.



Using Music to Start/Stop Active Play

Teaching children when to stop and start an active game is an important routine for managing movement. Using music is one way to teach this routine. Play music when you want children to do a certain movement, and stop music when you want children to freeze. This strategy is suggested several times throughout the activities in this curriculum.

Setting Up Your Environment

Think about your classrooms, home, play spaces and/or outdoor areas. Where can you encourage more **moderate to vigorous** active play?

Consider the following when setting up your environment for active play:

In All Spaces:

- Create a space that intentionally promotes physical activity.
- Define a clear activity area with definite boundaries.
- Keep play space safe, clean, and clutter free.
- Set clear expectations for behavior.

Indoor Space:

- Provide clear traffic patterns by setting up furniture or placing footprints or arrows on the floor to demonstrate where to walk.
- Choose developmentally appropriate materials for your space, including portable play equipment like bean bags, juggling/activity scarves, and parachutes.
- Display posters of active families, and keep books in reading area that show children dancing, moving and playing.

Outdoor Space:

- Provide a variety of materials and equipment for outdoor play.
- Provide both portable and fixed active play materials, making sure there is enough portable play equipment for all children to use.
- Ensure access to plenty of natural materials, such as trees or gardens.

Moderate to Vigorous Activity=

At first glance, it may seem that children are ALWAYS on the move. However, research shows that most of that movement is not moderate to vigorous activity, Moderate to Vigorous active play includes large muscle activities that exercise children's hearts and lungs.

What Does Moderate to Vigorous Activity Look like?

Children's hearts will beat faster, they will breathe harder, they might be a little sweaty and look slightly flushed.



Setting Up Your Environment

Setting-Up the In-Home Child Care Environment

The family child care physical activity environment may have some unique features. When indoors, consider arranging furniture to define spaces, like identifying an area for music and movement by carefully arranging couches or pillows. Think about opportunities that may occur naturally in your home for physical activity, such as hallways that can be used as “bowling alleys,” or furniture that can be used as an obstacle course. Use indoor-appropriate portable play equipment to encourage movement, such as ribbons, scarves, parachutes, or portable tunnels.

Mixed-Age Groups

Environments that support active play for mixed-age groups should aim to accommodate children of different physical abilities. Join children in physical activity whenever possible, and encourage positive interactions among children of all ages so they can learn from one another. Ensure infants have a safe space for tummy time and to explore their environment.



Making Free Play Active

Free play can be either active or sedentary. To encourage more movement during free play, provide easy access to gross motor toys within your environment, such as balls, bean bags, scarves, hula hoops, parachutes, etc.

Encouraging Children to Stay Active

Use adult-led active play to teach children about how their bodies should feel when they are being physically active. Help children to realize that these feelings that we may associate with discomfort (sweating, thirsty, tired, etc.) are actually good for our bodies in small doses because it means we’re being active.

Try saying the following during active play:

- Feel your heart—is it beating fast? This is great for your body and helps make you stronger.
- Sweating and breathing hard during play means you are giving your body a good workout.
- It’s good to feel a little thirsty after running or playing hard. Water is the best thing to take care of that thirsty feeling! (see activity “Fun with Fitness” on page 71 for more).

Teaching through Active Play

Physical Activity Education

You will find the following in each physical activity lesson:

- Activity Guide – includes instructions for leading each activity
- Suggested activity set-up (if applicable)
- Activity materials
- Goals for each activity, including emphasized fundamental movements skills
- Suggested wording to use when leading activities (in italicized font)
- “Quick Tips”—tips for leading certain activities
- Family Newsletter – short educational handout titled “*What We Learned Today*” containing information specific for 4 lessons: Managing Movement, Fun with Fitness, Movin’ and Groovin’, and Choose to Move—Reducing Screen Time. These pages are intended to be copied and distributed for parent engagement.

What You Need to Know:

- On the following pages, you will find several short activities intended to promote fundamental movement skills and active play. Each activity is intended for children ages 2-5 years.
- Each activity lasts for about 5-10 minutes, and are great for short bursts of physical activity throughout the day.
- If you are planning to lead a longer period of active play (about 20-30 minutes long), the activities on pages 61-100 can be grouped together into 4 separate lessons: Managing Movement (page 61), Fun with Fitness (page 71), Movin’ and Groovin’ (page 81), and Choose to Move—Reducing Screen Time (page 91).
- Fundamental movement skills are listed for each activity, including which category is emphasized in the activity (locomotor, object control, or stability).
- Each of these games and activities has been led in a variety of ECE environments as a part of the ChildcareAlive! program, including centers, family child care, and preschools.
- Videos are available online for some activities. Look for the video icon on these select activities, then visit www.childcarealive.org/curriculum to view the video.

