



## Active Physical Play

It is common knowledge that active play is important for the physical development of young children. Skills such as gross motor, depth perception, and visual-motor coordination are enhanced when children engage in physical education (Pica, 2008). However, there are many more benefits to active, physical play! Children are learning how to follow directions, how to cooperate and work with their peers, and building self-confidence (Craft & Smith, 2008). The benefits of physical activities are endless!

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), children under 5 years should have up to 3 hours of active play per day. In addition to the benefits stated above, physical activity helps to prevent childhood obesity. As technology continues to play a big role in our lives, it is more important than ever that we encourage our children to be active! Keep in mind that these do not have to be planned or group activities. Giving children time to have free play outdoors or in an open space indoors is a great way to encourage active play.

### Incorporating Physical Activity into Your Program

As stated above, we want to make sure our children are getting daily opportunities for active play. The good news is that you do not need to have any fancy, outdoor equipment to make this happen! While children do enjoy playing on swings or climbing equipment, there are plenty of ways to make your outdoor space enjoyable without those things.

Think about adding balls, hula hoops, ride on toys, jump ropes, and push toys to your outdoor space. You can also use different materials to create obstacle courses. Many times when there is no stationary play equipment, children are more likely to use their imaginations to come up with their own games or activities.



## Incorporating the ERS into Outdoor Play

Try thinking outside the box with your outdoor space. Almost any activity can be transformed into an outdoor activity. Think about adding some dramatic play outside. You can add some tools and mechanic vests and have the children “fix” bikes or other ride-on toys. For another idea, bring out some toy fruits and vegetables, money, and a cash register and create a little farmer’s market for the children to sell food.

It is always a great idea to have science tools outside. The children can use magnifying glasses to look at leaves, rocks, insects, and other things they may find outside. Encourage children to be active by setting a timer and having them race to find as many leaves or rocks (etc.) as they can in a certain amount of time. Then turn this into a math activity but counting or sorting the different objects!

Also, if you are worried about sand and water play being messy, bring it outside! There are many different materials you can add to enhance children’s play when it comes to sand and water. Measuring cups and funnels work great in both sand and water. Think about adding plastic fish and nets to your water table. The children can pretend they are catching fish. Small construction vehicles are a great addition to the sand table. Children can move the sand around with the different vehicles and build structures. Tip: If you are worried about children getting sand in their hair, keep dollar store shower caps in each of their cubbies and have them wear them during sand play!

Keep in mind that it is important for children to have ample amount of free play during outside time. When incorporating the aforementioned activities, try presenting them as options rather than whole group activities.

## Active Play During Winter

During the winter months it can seem difficult to get the recommended daily dose of physical activity. However, there are many ways to make sure your kids are still active! Here are some activities that can be done indoors when the weather does not permit outdoor play.

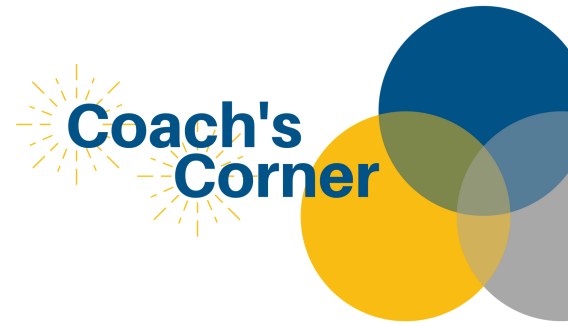
- If you have the space, have the children create an indoor, safe obstacle course. This is also a great time to use some positional words such as over, under, and through.
- Try playing Limbo with hula hoops. Younger children can crawl through the hoops and older children can try to do the traditional limbo.
- Think about incorporating time for movement activities each day. Some ideas may include, yoga, freeze dance, and Simon Says.
- For preschoolers who are learning letters, put out written letters on the floor, call out a letter and have the children throw bean bags on that letter. For more advanced children, move onto letter sounds; for younger children try this activity with colors.
- Use painters' tape or masking tape to create hopscotch in the classroom.
- Create colored circles out of construction paper and put them on the floor around the classroom. Make sure there are a few of each color. Play music and have the children walk in a circle around the classroom. When the music stops the children should choose a colored circle and stand on it. Each time the music stops remove a color until all children are on the same color.



### REMINDER

Unless it is precipitating or there is a weather advisory, it is important for children to get time to play outdoors.

Cold weather does not cause sickness!



## Resources

- Active Play! By: Diane Craft PhD & Craig L. Smith
- Physical Education for Young Children: Movement ABCs for the Little Ones By: Rae Pica
- Wiggle, Giggle, & Shake: 200 Ways to Move and Learn By: Rae Pica

## Professional Development

- Healthy Together: Teaching Nutrition and Healthy Living to Preschool Children
- Active Bodies, Active Minds (online)
- Preventing Obesity and Promoting Wellness in Early Childhood Settings (online)

**Also, check the Delaware Stars website for a list of supplemental curricular that promote healthy habits!**