



The importance of physical activity in the first six years of life

Developing Agility, Balance and Coordination

The ABCs of physical literacy

In the same way that children learn their alphabet as a stepping stone to reading and becoming literate, children should also develop their physical skills to become physically literate. Canadian Sport for Life defines being physically literate as a child having learned basic human movements, fundamental movement skills, and introductory sports skills before the start of their adolescent growth spurt. Three critical physical skills to develop are known as the ABCs of physical literacy: Agility, Balance and Coordination.

Developing Agility

Agility is about being able to change the body's position quickly and efficiently, and being able to do so in a wide range of different situations. It's about being quick and nimble.

Developing agility in children is a process that continues over a long period of time. You can't teach agility in a single session, but you can allow a child to develop it systematically by providing opportunities for the child to move from one spot to another using as wide a range of locomotor skills as possible.

This process should start as soon as the child can crawl by providing opportunities to crawl on different surfaces, and to crawl on and around different obstacles.

Once the child can walk and then run, things continue in the same way. Have a child walk and then run on flat and not-so-flat surfaces, uphill and downhill, and again over and around many different types of obstacle. Chasing and dodging games where the child has to start and stop quickly help to develop agility, and the child should be encouraged to stop, start and change direction as quickly as possible. Kicking and chasing a ball is a good and simple way to develop agility, particularly if



the surface is a bit rough and makes the ball bounce in different directions.

Developing Balance

Balance, like agility, takes a long time to develop, and there are two types of balance that children should master. They should be able to balance when standing still (stationary balance) and balance when they are moving around (dynamic balance).

Stationary balance can be developed by simple activities, such as standing on one foot, balancing on both knees, or balancing without moving on a narrow line or fallen log. Balance is about making connections between the part of the brain that controls balance, and the limb movements needed to stay upright. This takes lots of practice under many different conditions.

Dynamic balance develops along with agility as the child learns to walk and run. Activities that develop agility will also develop dynamic balance. This moving type of balance is also developed with learning new skills such as riding a scooter, tricycle or bike, or learning to skate, ski, or ride a toboggan.

Developing Coordination

Coordination is about controlling all of your body parts while doing different activities. It is about making and maintaining connections between the brain and the muscles that control movement. Activities that make the child use all his/her body parts at the same time are great. For example, if the child is old enough to play with balloons safely, have them try and keep 1, then 2, then 3 balloons in the air at the same time using both their hands and

their feet to keep the balloons up. Dance, gymnastics and other rhythmic activities are great for coordination, as are any activities that require a child to hit any object with their hand or a bat.

Key Ideas:

Agility, balance and coordination are critical building blocks of many later activities, and children should be given lots of opportunity to practice.

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