Information for parents, caregivers and early childhood educators

5 Active Start

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

Play Activities - The First Year of Life

16 cheap things to help a child develop good physical skills

Newborn to 6 months (activities that help children eventually develop balance and coordination)

(1) Hold and support the infant while you move around (to music if you like). Slowly move the child up, down, and around.

(2) Place the baby on a blanket or other soft surface and very gently roll him/her from side to side.

(3) With the baby laying on her/his back, hold each hand in yours, and cross the baby's hands in front of her/his body (so she/he hugs herself/himself), and then uncross her/his hands. Repeat this several times and then do the same with her/his legs. Having her/his hands and legs cross the mid-line of the body is important for developing coordination.

(4) Since balance also depends on how a child "feels" the ground under them, spend time stroking their hands and feet using different soft items such as feathers or grass, and different hard items like a smooth plastic toy.

(5) Place favorite toys at the edge of the child's reach, and encourage her/him to roll-over to reach them.

At 6-8 months

(6) Sit the child on your knees, on your ankles, or on your feet, and bounce him/her gently to move up and down and side to side. Support her/him with your hands and always make sure that you can catch her/him if she/he starts to lose balance.

(7) Help children support their weight on their legs in a standing position by holding both their hands when they are in a sitting position, and gently helping them stand by pulling up.

(8) Make bath time fun to develop a love of the water. Make sure water is comfortably warm, and that there are colourful toys to play with. Help the child make splashing movements. For safety, make sure that you keep your hands on the child at all times.

(9) When the child can sit unaided, sit on the floor close to and facing the child, and roll a colourful ball a few inches to the child. Encourage the child to push it back to you - this will help in tracking moving objects later on.

(10) Hang a mobile over the crib so that when the child wakes up, she/he has moving objects to watch. If she/he is outside, put her/him under a tree so that she/he can see the leaves and branches moving. Once the child is sitting up, remove the mobile for safety.

At 9-12 months

(11) Arrange secure furniture so that the child can pull themselves up in such a way that they can "cruise" around a low table holding on. Place furniture a short distance apart so that the child can make an unsupported move from one piece to another. Watch out for sharp corners!

(12) Find soft rubber balls in different colours for children to grasp and push around.

(13) Make sure that children get outside in the fresh air. Take them for a walk in a buggy or sleigh (with side supports), and make going for a walk a part of each day. This is really good for parents and caregivers too! They will all probably sleep better as well.

(14) Sing songs, clap hands and dance. Do rhythmic activities, with or without music.

(15) Provide a safe place where the child can play with toys and move around without getting hurt. A safe, stimulating environment is the best learning tool you can provide.

When they can walk - or are just trying

(16) Provide lots of opportunities for walking - and falling - safely! Gently support under the child's arms and gradually remove your support. Sit a few feet away and encourage the baby to come to you. Walk on different surfaces, walk slightly uphill and slightly downhill. Walk with and without shoes on. Sometimes encourage the child to walk and carry toys to develop balance.

Most of all, be an active role model - children learn from watching!

- Activities that develop control of the body, balance and coordination.
- Activities that develop eye-tracking skills and the ability to throw/strike, kick and catch
- Activities that develop locomotor skills - ability to move from one spot to another
- Activities that will help with swimming later in life

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