

FUN WITH FITNESS

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Children Close their Ears
to Advice but Open their
Eyes to Example



Taking Care of Yourself
is part of Taking Care
of your Kids

INTRODUCTION

The experts tell us that our children are in a fitness crisis. We now know more about the importance of physical activity and good nutrition in maintaining health and yet our children are more unfit than ever.

More and more we are discovering that physical activity plays as important a role as nutrition in a child's growth, development, and overall physical health. Experts believe that early experience with physical activity will enhance a child's mental development, social skills, relationships with others, and most importantly their long-term health and well-being.

Information about fitness and physical activities should be presented in a fun and flexible way to appeal to children. We know that attitudes and values fostered in children can last a life time. Children should be encouraged to participate at their own level with little or no emphasis placed on competition or the need to perform in a certain way. Childcare providers have a unique opportunity to introduce children to the 'magic of movement' at a very early age.





Fitness Facts



Obesity among children has increased by 54 percent since the 1960's., with a 40% increase among adolescents.



Forty percent of American children aged five to eight have at least one heart disease risk factor, which could be caused by being overweight.



Health and fitness of children is significantly associated with the physical behaviors of their parents.

ANDYET...



Fewer than 53 percent of mothers of first through fourth grade children participate in moderate to vigorous exercise, which is a minimum of 30 minutes a day



Increased physical fitness has been linked with increased academic success.



Increased physical fitness has been linked with increased self-esteem.





Tips for Working with Children



Keep safety in mind. Anticipate and avoid if possible, any hazards that may be involved with the activity. Talk with children before starting.



Fitness should be perceived by children as fun and stress-free.



Allow children to develop physically at their own pace.



Give lots of encouragement and support.



Set a good example by being physically active yourself.



Keep "skill building" sessions short and enjoyable.



Try to create a sense of pride in being physically active.



Use activity to foster discussions about the importance of healthy food. Relate food to the ability to have energy and be active.



Never push children into a competitive activity or sport. Like fitness, activities and sports have to be fun for children to want to participate.



Make sure children drink plenty of water during activities and games. Children produce more body heat and have a less efficient mechanism for getting rid of that heat than adults do. Drinking plenty of water will help with this process.

NOTE: Be aware of any restrictions the children in your care may have. Always talk with parents before you start any physical fitness activities with the children.



Basketball: See who can bounce the ball continuously the longest. Have everyone join in counting the bounces. For older children, have them bounce the ball using only one hand.

Miniature Kick Course: Set up a mini-kick course by placing empty boxes, buckets, trash cans or other large containers around the room or outside. Containers should be placed on their sides so a ball could easily be kicked or rolled into it. The children then kick the ball through or into each container. Emphasize aiming and controlled kicking. For older children you could time them individually.

Bowling: Using the same containers as for the kick course, have children roll the ball instead of kicking it around the course. The object is not to knock down the objects, but to successfully roll the ball into the containers.

Who Can? Give each child a yarn or foam ball or bean bag and have each choose an open space. Ask "Who can?" questions such as who can toss the ball in the air and catch it, who can toss and catch the ball while lying down, or who can clap their hands before catching the ball? What other "who can?" questions can you think of?



Rope & String

Safety First

Ask children to take turns when jumping to prevent collisions.

Talk to children about the danger of ropes and strings. Discuss tripping, choking, etc.

Be sure strings and/or ropes are loosely suspended or tied no higher than the child's waist.



Jump the River: Give children two ropes and have them create a 'river' by laying the ropes side-by-side on the floor with some space between them. Have children practice 'jumping the river' by jumping over the space and landing on two feet. To add excitement, have children make paper sharks, alligators, etc. to put in the 'river'. For variation, make the river wider or narrower.

Rope Limbo: Have two children hold a rope by each end. Play music (or the Limbo song) while children go under the rope any way they can. Have the children holding the rope lower it a little each time the group passes under it.

Volleyball: Tie a rope to two chairs that are placed 4 to 5 feet apart. Children work in pairs, standing on opposite sides of their line. Explain that the line is a boundary they may not cross. Each pair volleys the yarn, foam ball or balloon back and forth trying to keep it in the air.



Rhythm & Music

Safety First

Remind children to be aware of others while jumping to prevent collisions.

Remind children to bend their knees when they land to protect their knees and joints.

Remind children to put enough space between them and other children to avoid bumping into each other.



Scatter bases: Using pieces of fabric, carpet, paper etc. place 'bases' around the room. Beat a drum or play another musical instrument to create a rhythm. Children should walk around the room to the rhythm. When the drum stops, each child goes to the base nearest him/her. Repeat this activity using different directions such as backward, sideways, diagonally, etc. To avoid pushing and shoving, make sure there is a base for each child.

Jack Be Nimble: Have children make candlesticks using empty toilet tissue tubes and construction paper. Each candlestick will need a base so it can stand on the floor. Together recite the nursery rhyme "Jack Be Nimble." Every time you say the words "Jack jumped over the candlestick" have someone jump over their candlestick. For variation have the children jump different ways; sideways, high, fast, etc.

Ribbons and Scarves: Using ribbons and/or scarves show children various movements such as circles, zig-zags, whips, sweeps, waves and figure 8's. While playing music call out movements. Change the movements as the music changes. Ribbons and scarves are easy to use and visually appealing. Movements can be slow and floating or quick and peppy.

A Simple Roll of Tape

Safety First

Be sure everyone has enough space to avoid collisions.

Ask children to hop slowly to avoid losing their balance.

When skating, remind children to keep their feet in contact with the floor. Some children may be tempted to run or do a baseball slide.



Hopscotch: Mark off a hopscotch area on the rug with tape. Children play hopscotch as well as practicing hopping from one foot to another.

Ice Skating: This activity works best with a wood or vinyl floor. Mark off a large circle with tape. Children should all be wearing socks. Have children practice "skating" around the circle keeping their feet in contact with the floor. Switch directions. Take the same activity outside, but have children use roller skates to skate around the circle.

Musical Hoops: Mark off enough tape circles on the rug so that each child has one circle. Play music or beat a drum and have children walk, hop, skip, crawl or jump around the circles until the music or drum stops. Then each child must enter into a circle as fast as they can.

Hoop Hop: Make several 1 to 2-foot-wide circles around the room using tape or construction paper. Assign each child a 'hoop'. Have the children hop in and out of the hoop on one foot until they have hopped all the way around the hoop. Then change feet and hop in and out and around until finished again.



Keeping Expectations Realistic

Growth and Child Development



Children 12 Months Old may be able to:

- Stand alone for a short time
- Walk holding onto objects
- Roll a ball
- Cup their hands



Children 15 - 18 Months Old may be able to:

- Walk without holding on
- Creep up the steps
- Jump in place
- Toss a ball
- Kneel without support



Children 2 Years Old may be able to:

- Kick a ball
- Run and climb
- Go up and down stairs one at a time



Children 3 - 4 Years Old may be able to:

- Hop
- Jump on one foot
- Ride a tricycle or bicycle with training wheels



Children 5 - 6 Years Old may be able to:

- Skip



Getting Started

To get started with a physical fitness program the following tips may be helpful:

Set a preliminary time plan of activities. Maybe make an activity chart showing activities, days and times. Let the children help with this.

Don't plan too much at once. Start slowly and add more activities as you and the children become familiar with the activities.

Review and revise your program periodically. As you and the children become more active and add new and different activities, and more activity days.

Get parents involved. Let them know what you are doing to help promote physical fitness with their children. Discuss ways they can encourage their children to be physically active when they are home.

Have children help you plan "fitness snacks" on activity days. Make suggestions like raw veggies and dip that would make them stronger and taste delicious. Fresh fruit and/or cheese would be easy and healthy. Add whole wheat crackers and you've got some happy, healthy children.

Make sure to discuss your plans with parents and if any of your children have limitations, be sure you have made accommodations to include everyone.





Staying with It



FUN is the key. If it's not fun children will lose interest and so will you.



Encourage each child to improve as an individual and not to necessarily compete with one another. Strive for a "personal best."



Help children set individual fitness goals. Give "points" for activity and health behaviors. Give special favors or rewards for points earned.



Create an area in your home that will interest children in physical movement.



Plan for active outings. Walks, biking, skating, swimming, and running activities in the context of a field trip will make activity fun.



Once children get the hang of it, ask them to make up their own games or activities.



Listen and move to music. It is a real motivator for kids.



Schedule your physical fitness activities time as you would any other activity. Write it down on your calendar and stick to it.



Have a backup activity ready. Raining or snowing outside? Be sure to have an indoor activity ready.



Phrases That Praise



The words and phrases you use with children can have a lasting effect on them. Remember their self-esteem and confidence is growing and developing just like their bodies and what you say and how you say it is very important. Choose your words and your tone carefully.

Phrases that praise the child's participation

- That's nice
- I like the way you are moving
- Good for you
- Very creative
- You make it look easy
- You've got it now
- Super
- Beautiful
- Looks good to me
- Now you have it
- You are on the right track
- I'm very proud of the way you moved today

- Wonderful
- I like that movement
- You figured it out
- Very clever
- Exactly right
- That's great
- Wow
- Terrific
- Excellent
- Good thinking
- I knew you could
- Nice try

Phrases that praise the child's movement ability

I like the way you...

- ...used your arms for balance.
- ...formed your body into a tiny shape.
- ...stretched your body upward.
- ...made your legs long and tight.

- ...tightened your muscles for control.
- ...moved one body part and then the other.
- ...moved your body from a low level to a high level.
- ...moved smoothly throughout general space.



Eat Smart

Delicious, Nutritious Fun Snacks

It is important to develop good eating habits at an early age. As caregivers it is your job to teach and encourage healthy eating habits to the children in your care. The following are quick, delicious and most importantly healthy snacks.

The Hungry Caterpillar



- 6 slices, medium sliced whole wheat bread
- 6 slices medium sliced white bread
- 3 tablespoons cream cheese
- 3 tablespoons mango chutney
- ¼ cucumber, thinly sliced
- A little softened butter
- 3 large slices of edam or swiss cheese
- 1 large tomato, thinly sliced

Kids Love to Crunch

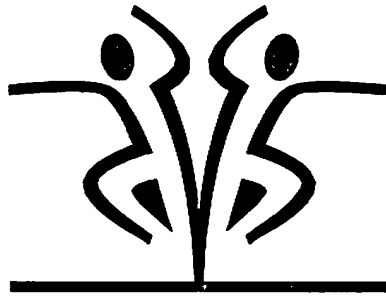
- Apple slices or carrot sticks.
- Orange slices
- Strawberries, blueberries, raspberries
- Low-fat yogurt
- Cheese sticks and whole grain crackers (Wheat Thins)
- Raisins

Fresh Fruit



Yogurt





Remember

Physical activity and good nutrition are essential in maintaining health. Physical activity plays as important a role as nutrition in a child's growth, development, and overall physical health.

Experience early on with physical activity can enhance a child's mental development, social skills, relationships with others, and most importantly their long-term health and well-being.

We know now that physical activity can be anything from an organized sport or game to a walk or hike. It can require special equipment or none. Look around your house for items that can be 'recycled' into sports or game equipment. Use your imagination. Children are easily entertained, and FUN is key.

Drink plenty of fluids. Water is very important during physical activity. As is stretching before and after to avoid muscle injury. It is a good idea to have nutritious snacks available after any activity. Follow all the safety rules with any activity allowing for adequate space and making sure all equipment and activity areas are free from sharp edges or objects that could cause injury.

As childcare providers you play an important role in the lives of the children you care for. Set a good example by being physically active yourself. Encourage the children to participate at their own level striving for their 'personal best.' Remember that what you say to children and how you say it can have a lasting effect on them. Keep this in mind when you are choosing your words of encouragement and praise.

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