



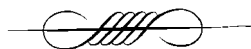
Let's Get Moving



Key Words

motor development, creative movement,
exercise, physical activity, obesity prevention

Editor's Note: As new parenting and family issues arise, **Family Information Services** seeks out practitioners with expertise to address that issue and provide our subscribers with information and strategies for supporting families in making positive change. We are pleased to introduce a new column developed by Lynn Cox and Terry Lubbers. *Lets Get Moving* is a column addressing the alarming trend of childhood obesity and lack of physical activity. (See also the October 2003 audio interview with Dr. David Walsh on *The Childhood Obesity Epidemic*.)



It's No Secret — Recent studies by specialists in the area of motor development, movement, and exercise physiology reflect the importance of daily physical activity for all children — beginning at birth. For it to be part of children's daily life, we as adult caregivers "in the village" have a unique role and responsibility to provide increased opportunities for participation in physical activity that fosters skill development, creativity and imagination. Young children are not miniature adults and have very specific needs relative to weight control and physical activity.

Obesity Epidemic — The Center for Disease Control has labeled overweight/obesity as a "public health emergency." The American Academy of Pediatrics states that obesity in children and adolescents has had a rate of increase that has doubled in the past 20 years and tripled since the 1960s. Eighty percent of overweight kids become overweight adults !

The American Heart Association reports:

- 22% of children and adolescents ages 6-18 are overweight.
- Physical activity for young children may promote lifelong activity, thereby preventing the development of chronic diseases such as heart disease, diabetes, obesity and some forms of cancer.
- Multiple research studies have found evidence that increasing physical education time improves academic performance, despite the fact that it might reduce class time.
- Physical activity patterns in youth, track to adulthood.
- Poor diet and sedentary activity patterns account for 300,000 adult deaths each year — second only to tobacco use as the major behavioral cause of death.

The Big Connection: Movement and Learning — A learning environment that is enriched with developmentally appropriate movement experiences promotes not only physical development but also cognitive, emotional and social development. When multiple sensory modalities are used, neural connections are created across numerous pathways in the brain. The branching of these connections are the beginnings in wiring the brain for future learning. Brain stimulation through early life experiences is very important in shaping a child's later life. Acquisition of beginning skills lay the foundation for development of more complex skills. In short, *when children learn to move, they move to learn.*

Quest for Quality in Movement and Play — It is important that movement experiences are not left to chance, but are planned and integrated throughout life. Consideration should be given to a variety of factors when creating movement opportunities for children.

1. Adults are guides or facilitators for movement. They create the environment with specific outcomes in mind. Children learn through observation, guidance, encouragement, modeling, and participation. Opportunities should be provided for children to explore a range of movement possibilities, make choices, and seek creative ways to move. Both structured and unstructured movement opportunities need to be provided.
2. Movement and play opportunities need to be designed for the developmental level of the children. Adequate time for practice and repetition, is important.
3. Activities should be selected that allow maximum participation. Provide sufficient equipment so that all children can participate. Equipment provided in a variety of shapes, sizes, textures, allows for active participation at a variety of developmental levels. Elimination type activities and long or inactive waiting periods in games should be avoided.
4. Opportunities for individual and creative expression should be provided. Children should be encouraged to challenge themselves to find solutions to movement challenges and to express their imaginations when moving and playing.

Role Models: Caregivers/Teachers —

When family members, and teachers are physically active role models, they will positively influence the child's urge to move and explore his or her environments. Research suggests that parent/caregiver involvement plays a significant role in successful learning for young children. The caregivers who appreciate the importance of physical activity are better able to facilitate movement experiences for their children.

The Link: Who, What, When, Where, How — Opportunities to facilitate movement experiences for children are around every corner. Physical activity can occur in small or large blocks of time in a variety of locations and throughout the course of daily routines. An activity could be as simple as balancing on one foot while standing in the check-out lane at the grocery store. Or it could be more complex such as creating and playing in a backyard obstacle course. Activities that require no or little equipment can be as motivating and active as play with large, expensive equipment. During the months of January, May, and September, look for the *Let's Get Moving* column for large motor movement ideas that are no/low cost and portable. (These activities are selected and adapted from the book, ***Make It Take It — Creating Movement Challenge Kits for Play at Home or School*** authored by Lynn Cox and Terry Lubbers.)

We, “the village,” can make the difference for children to be physically active for a lifetime. An exciting journey of setting attitudes and developing skills begins as children are “learning to move and moving to learn.”

“Let's Get Moving!”

Resources

National Association for Sport and Physical Education. (2002) *Active Start: A Statement of Physical Activity Guidelines for Children Birth to Five Years*. **American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance**. Reston, VA: NASPE/AAHPERD Publications. p. 2.

Walsh, David. *Couch Potatoes in Dangers of Becoming Couch Melons*. **Family Information Services**, October 2003.



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