

Section 1:

Introducing

Physical Development

Why the Need for Physical Development?

Ask yourself the following: can you tie a shoelace? Can you walk across a room in a straight line? Can you go up and down stairs with ease? Clearly, as adults, we have built up sophisticated skills in movement, negotiation and manipulation to be able to undertake these activities with 'mastered precision'. Young children, however, simply do not have these capabilities. This is why it is so important for children to engage in purposeful, challenging and exciting physical activity.

- *Movement for the fun of it.* Set up activities that allow children to feel the freedom and enjoyment of moving. For example, they could build towers out of cardboard boxes to jump off; splash and kick water in the paddling pool; and use dance-like movements to greet each other rather than using spoken words.
- *Learn by being active.* Simply encouraging children to go and run outside supports them to practically appreciate the effects of exercise on their bodies and the Personal, Social and Emotional Development (PSED) benefits of running around with others, which in turn helps to build a sense of achievement and well-being.
- *Up! Do! Move!* Plan physically active adult-led activities as opposed to sitting down 'chalk and talk' delivery, which can result in young children sitting for unnecessary amounts of time. For example, teach simple counting through movement: *one* star jump, *two* claps, *three* nods of the head, *four* knee bends . . .
- *Move yourself.* Model movements so children have something to base their own movements on. An example would be babies learning to crawl.

The Goodness of Physical Development in Young Children's Lives

As is highlighted in the Introduction to this book, Physical Development (PD) plays an essential part in helping to support the lives of children in terms of being physically active. The media coverage of overweight and obese children is constant, but there are many other reasons why the development of a healthy and active way of life is important, and these should drive the reasoning behind practice.

- *Obesity.* Statistics continually change regarding the percentages of children who are considered to be overweight or obese by the age of 7. All we need to remember is that the prevalence of obesity increases with age, therefore having a good run around or doing 15 star jumps every day is very important.
- *Bone density.* Research has shown that exercise is more effective than calcium in increasing bone density. Get your young children jumping, running, bounding and stamping to make those bones big and strong.
- *Preventing disease.* Obesity in adults can increase the likelihood of their developing diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease and respiratory infections. Getting involved with the children as they engage with their PD will help your life as well.
- *Muscle strength.* Physical activity helps to strengthen and build children's muscles, enabling them to move more quickly and with greater confidence. While we do not want to turn our young children into bodybuilders, muscle tone is all for the good, so encourage them, where appropriate, to help you lift and carry resources for others to use.
- *Self-esteem.* Children with high self-esteem are able to achieve anything they want to, because they have the self-belief and determination to succeed. Physical activity plays a vital role in building this self-realization, so make them feel good about themselves by setting realistic personal challenges.
- *Gross and fine motor movements.* Babies and young children need lots of opportunities to practise, hone and develop limb-eye coordination, dexterity and large movements with their bodies. Provide such opportunities through a balance of indoor and outdoor provision.

What Physical Development Means for Children in the Early Years

Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) are keen to engage in anything physically oriented, mainly because movement is as natural and essential to their lives as are love, care, rest and nutrition. For young children to get the best out of life, PD should drive the following:

- *Activity.* Encourage children to engage in large-movement household tasks such as cleaning, cooking, washing and drying in the setting so that a 'purpose' to movement and action is developed. Learning to make small movements with books – holding them correctly, turning the pages and interacting appropriately with the flaps and tabs – is a very important activity too.
- *Challenge.* Provide frequent opportunities for children to cut out shapes with various cutting implements, use knives and forks to eat with, skip (on their own and with ropes), and develop an effective grip in using writing and art tools, which most children notoriously find a challenge.
- *Confidence.* Build self-esteem levels by allowing babies and children to move and wriggle, run freely, climb with safety in mind, pour drinks for others, and steer tricycles around obstacle courses.
- *Imagination.* Encourage children to become characters (e.g. the pig from the story *The Pig in the Pond*) or objects (e.g. bubbles), and enter into situations (e.g. escaping from the Giant's lair), to build up exciting ways of moving.
- *Safety.* Actively support and remind children about appropriate ways of washing and drying their hands, putting their feet squarely on the pedals of trikes, and being aware of 'hot spots' where they are not allowed to play.
- *A positive sense of well-being.* Plan activities that help children to work as a team, cooperating, sharing and taking turns with others. Work to ensure there are lots of 'puff and pant' activities to bring some rosy colour to children's faces.

The Four Themes of the EYFS and Physical Development

The four key themes which express the principles that underpin effective practice in the EYFS are designed to guide the work of all early years practitioners. It is therefore important to develop an idea of how these can drive (and potentially already are driving) standards for Learning, Development and Care across the EYFS age phase.

- *A unique child.* Plan activities that develop a sense of confidence and achievement from what the child can already do. For example, once young children are able to grasp and hold on to objects, encourage them to post the objects into containers. Build competencies by ensuring that activities are based on active participation. For example, share oral suggestions to help children to throw beanbags a greater distance, combining these with demonstrations and opportunities for children to put them into practice.
- *Positive relationships.* Work with parents and carers so that they appreciate the value and importance of PD in their child's life. Encourage them to be active with their babies and young children outside of the setting – see Ideas 94 and 96. Build strength and confidence by modelling actions and techniques, playing *with* and *alongside* children. Use verbal and non-verbal strategies to motivate and excite.
- *Enabling environments.* Work collaboratively with practitioners, parents and carers, other settings and external professionals to provide a stimulating environment for children to play in that is safe, secure and challenging – see Idea 91. Ensure that children have daily planned access to outdoor play areas irrespective of the weather (settings in Norway do it, so why can't we?).
- *Learning and development.* Use cross-curricular links to strengthen and validate learning experiences – see Section 8. Strive for different types of play to permeate through planning for PD, based on the needs of the children. Use open-ended questioning – Who . . . ? What . . . ? Where . . . ? Why . . . ? How . . . ? When . . . ? – to stimulate creative and critical thinking. Appreciate the importance of having a good understanding of child development, recognizing the value of differentiation (see Idea 87) and quality-first teaching to support practice.

Physical Development and the Commitments for Themes 1 and 2 of the EYFS

‘A Unique Child’ and ‘Positive Relationships’ are invaluable themes that support children in their PD. The four commitments that drive each theme are able to work individually or in partnership with others to strengthen Learning and Development. But what do these commitments look like in practice, particularly in relation to Physical Development?

- *Child development.* Babies and children develop physically at different rates and in different ways. Differentiate in terms of resources, ability, age, expectations, support and levels of encouragement (see Idea 87).
- *Inclusive practice.* Embrace diversity by valuing and integrating community movement, for example bhangra dancing, into the curriculum (see Idea 30).
- *Keeping safe.* Protect children by using well-made resources, mats and aprons, and teach practices linked to lifting, lowering and using large and small pieces of equipment (see Idea 34).
- *Health and well-being.* Work with the children to keep the setting clean and safe, providing open access to the outdoor play area even if it is drizzling outside (see Idea 88).
- *Respecting each other.* Build honest and warm relationships with children so that you can give them practical help and emotional support with ease (see Idea 70).
- *Parents as partners.* Reflect on the quality and quantity of suggestions made linked to Ideas 96 and 97 in ensuring that you regard parents as partners.
- *Supporting learning.* Learn to step back and watch children, giving them time and space to develop physical skills, knowledge and understanding. Offer appropriate challenges and new learning where appropriate (see Idea 67).
- *Key person.* Support babies and children in being confident in engaging in PD activities through constant reassurance, encouragement and comfort (see Idea 47).

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The Commitments for Themes 3 and 4 and Physical Development

‘Enabling Environments’ and ‘Learning and Development’ are the remaining two themes that drive EYFS policy and practice. Their associated commitments (see Idea 5) are invaluable in assuring quality provision and experiences for children linked to PD; let’s examine these in turn.

- *Observation, assessment and planning.* Starting points for PD should always be from where the child is at; for example, if a child is interested in superhero play, use this as a way of developing gross motor skills, such as by exploring different ways of travelling to catch the baddy.
- *Supporting each child.* Practitioners should plan and provide for each child, depending on that child’s ‘learning journey’. Meet individual needs through personalized activities and one-to-one support.
- *The learning environment.* The emotional, indoor and outdoor environment has a real impact on children’s physical development. Help children to feel safe and secure, yet brave and adventurous, when using large and small resources through your generous use of praise, encouragement and empathy.
- *The wider context.* Build effective communication links with parents, other settings, professionals, individuals and groups or establishments within the community, such as health visitors, doctors and sports centres, to form partnerships to tackle childhood obesity, and support progress towards the five outcomes of Every Child Matters (ECM) (DfES, 2004).
- *Play and exploration.* Various types of play, such as solitary, collaborative and rough-and-tumble, should be promoted through the physical development activities provided, both indoors and outdoors. Work to plan for these.
- *Active learning.* PD requires movement, be it large or small; active learning supports this. Enough said.
- *Creativity and critical thinking.* Set creative challenges, such as ‘How many different ways can you go down the slide?’ or ‘How might you move through the obstacle course with one body part always on the floor?’, while asking questions to promote thinking, such as ‘Can you throw the beanbag further before or after snack time?’ or ‘Who can jump the highest? Why do you think that?’
- *Areas of learning and development.* See Section 8 for more details.

The Relationship between Physical Literacy and Physical Development

Physical literacy is focused on the development of fundamental movement and sports skills in children and young people – see www.physical-literacy.org.uk. Research has shown that many children will withdraw from physical activity, becoming more inactive and making unhealthy choices in their later life, if they fail to develop physical literacy. Therefore, integrating this into your policy and provision is considered to be best practice at this present time.

- *Ground, snow, ice and water.* Children need to develop their skills in these four environments. Consider which areas dominate your physical development provision at present. How could you introduce more opportunities for children to work in snow or on ice?
- *Run like the wind.* Encourage children to run not only in straight lines but with stops, starts and changes in direction. Tag and chasing games are great ways to achieve this.
- *Body shape play.* Engage children with activities that support them in making body shapes and movements. Have them pretend to slither like a snake and roll like a rolling pin on the floor or down a small grassy slope.
- *Quiet times.* For quiet times, or when in small spaces, play balancing games. For example, the children could stand on one foot with one hand on top of their heads. Try balancing on different body parts – hands, knees, bellies, backs, tiptoes – working to build confidence and capabilities.
- *Jumping games.* Have them jump up, making shapes in the air. See how high the children can jump, or how far. Have them try jumping from one foot or from both at the same time.
- *Cycling activities.* Riding a tricycle or a bike – with or without training wheels – will develop children's dynamic balance.

The Link Between Physical Development and Standards

There is no secret: physical development can raise educational standards. As every setting and provider is to be inspected regarding the quality of its early years provision, it is no surprise that practitioners are striving to raise standards in all areas of Learning and Development. So what can physical development do and how?

- *Ready to learn?* A bit of Brain Gym® (visit <http://esl.about.com/od/englishlessonplans/a/braingym.htm>) and Wake and Shake (www.youthsporttrust.org) can get children in the mood for learning. Try it throughout the day and watch the children reap the benefits of their engaged attitudes. Activ8 (www.activ8.org) is an exciting alternative.
- *Will your handwriting be legible?* Encourage the rotation of the shoulders and arms (play Windmills, in which children's arms whirl backwards, forwards and in opposite directions, both individually and at the same time) and wrists and fingers (try threading, cutting with scissors, and painting) so that children will build up increasing control and confidence using writing implements.
- *'What wonderful vocabulary you have, my dear.'* Physical activity encourages children to listen to, use and interpret language. Engage children in dance (Whirl! Flutter! Shivel! Bound!), challenges ('How could you get down the ladder using only one arm?') and game play ('Can you explain to me the rules of Squigglehop?') for purposeful language use.
- *Being brilliantly behaved.* One of the hardest things for young children to do is sit still, so build this up gradually, encouraging them to be well behaved for 3 minutes on the carpet, then 4, then 5 . . .
- *Reading for a purpose.* Encourage children to read signs, labels on boxes and gaming instructions to raise standards and expectations linked to reading.

Movement Milestones

Practitioners and parents and carers are likely to be aware of movement 'milestones': broad age-related expectations for the developing child that all children are checked against. Awareness of the progressive sequence of development and activities associated with these milestones is very important not only for practitioners but also for parents and carers:

- *Birth to the first few weeks.* Have soft toys and rattles to hand to encourage development of the baby's reflex actions.
- *3 to 6 months.* Use sounds, voices and toys to promote the lifting of the head while supporting the baby to sit on their own or against an object.
- *6 to 8 months.* Support the baby in sitting up unaided. Demonstrate how to pass objects between hands, giving them encouragement.
- *8 to 12 months.* Provide plenty of space for children to crawl. Play 'creepy crawlies' by allowing the child to creep away from you while you creep slowly after them. Support them in walking but take care of the environment as they begin to pull themselves up to a standing position. Cloths on dining room tables are certain to be pulled off!
- *12 to 18 months.* Man those stairs or steps, thus allowing the child to climb them unaided and creep backwards down them. Encourage them to walk unaided between objects, people and spaces.
- *24 to 36 months.* Ask children to help you at snack time, opening bottles of milk, cutting bread into squares or triangles and washing up crockery to develop those fine motor skills.
- *36 to 48 months.* Play 'Peek-a-boo', encouraging children to creep up on you from afar, tiptoeing, running, stopping and coming downstairs in a quest to get you!
- *40 to 60 months.* Get up and go! Let those feet move in different ways, at different speeds, along with hopping, jumping and tricycle riding.

Adapted from Woodfield, L. (2004) *Physical Development in the Early Years*. London: Continuum.

Activities and Games from the PE Store 1

In order for practitioners to effectively ensure quality provision in their settings, there is a real need for innovative and exciting activities to engage children in purposeful physical activity. This is where this Idea fits in; it simply acts as a collection of wonderful, wacky and weird activities that are sure to get children active.

- *Strictly Movement.* Bring *Strictly Come Dancing* and *Dancing on Ice* into the setting by providing space for children to move to music in the style of a rumba, a cha-cha or freestyle.
- *Fine motor manipulation.* Help children to develop their fine motor skills by inviting them to create pegboard patterns, complete jigsaws or fasten elastic bands to safe pegboards.
- *Funky bedding.* Create paper bedding for the setting's hamster by cutting along different lines (zigzag, wiggly, ripply, straight and curved) to create different-shaped offcuts.
- *Chase games.* Teach children how to play Cops and Robbers, Stig in the Dump and other games that encourage chasing, dodging and catching skills.
- *Just keep rolling.* Support children in using their bodies to represent objects that roll, such as a snowball going down a hill, a car without its handbrake on or a ball of dung being pushed by a beetle.
- *West End calling.* Play music from different musicals that have big dance numbers for the children to enjoy and move to, such as *Beauty and the Beast*, *Stomp* and *Hairspray*.

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