

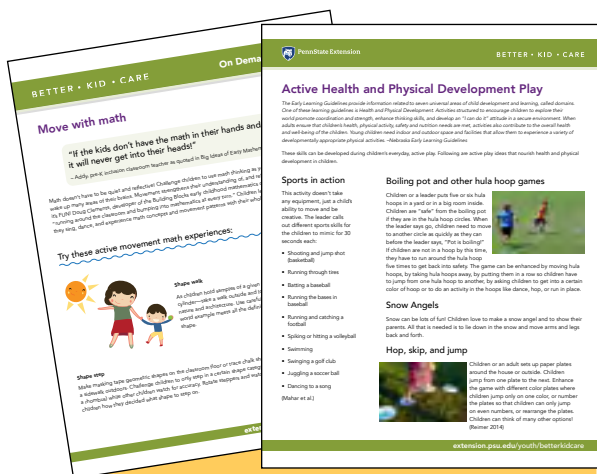
PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT



BETTER • KID • CARE

Activities to support your child's engagement, learning, and development

These physical development ideas can be adapted for one-on-one use, or for small groups.



Click the links to download a PDF to view and/or print!

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Active play for rainy days

Do the children drive you crazy when they have to play inside on rainy days?

Children need active play every day. Taking children outside where they can use their large muscles to run, jump, skip, climb, hop, ride a bike, swing, and slide is the best kind of active play.



What do you do when it is too rainy or cold to play outside? The children still need some active play time. Not many people have gyms in their houses to allow children to run and jump like they do when they play outside. Try planning some rainy day activities to give the children active play time indoors. Here are some ideas:

Puddle jumping

You'll need:

newspaper or colored construction paper

What to do:

Cut or tear puddle shapes out of newspaper or colored construction paper. Let the children help you to lay the "puddles" on the floor. Have the children take turns jumping in the puddles, around the puddles, over the puddles, etc.

Variation: Change this game by setting out boxes with low sides instead of paper puddles. Have the children hop from box to box, around the boxes, in and out of the boxes, etc.

Box crawling

You'll need:

several large cardboard boxes

What to do:

Open the ends of each box. Set the boxes on the floor so the children can crawl in and out of one box and into another.

Move with the music

You'll need:

recordings of music with a fast beat

What to do:

Turn on the music and let the children dance to the beat.

Run, fly, or swim

What to do:

Talk with the children to decide on movements to act out a creature running, flying, and swimming. Call out the name of a bird, fish, or animal. The children decide if the named creature runs, flies, or swims and act it out.

Indoor obstacle course

What to do:

Use chairs, boxes, tables, etc., to create an indoor obstacle course. Make sure there are things for children to go over, under, step into, go around, etc.

Children need active play every day.

Action stories

Tell a story. Have the children act out the parts as you tell it. They may want to wear dress up clothes as they pretend to play their parts in the story.

Action songs

Sing action songs with the children. They may want to help make up the movements. Start with some simple ones like:

- The Farmer in the Dell
- London Bridge
- Ring Around the Rosie
- Here We Go Round the Mulberry Bush
- Teddy Bear

Board walk

You'll need:

one 2 x 4 wooden board

What to do:

Lay the wooden board flat on the floor. Show the children how to walk on the board and let them try it. Once they get used to walking, have them try walking heel to toe. Move on to other ways: sideways, backwards, jumping off the board, jumping over the board, straddling the board. Let the children think of new ways to walk on the board.

Pop-up

You'll need:

one large cardboard box

What to do:

Ask for one child to sit in the box. Have the other children walk around the box singing "Pop Goes the Weasel" or another simple favorite song. At the end of the song, the children shout "POP."

When the child in the box hears the word "Pop," she jumps up like a jack-in-the-box. Another child goes to sit in the box while the rest walk around singing.

Hide and hunt

You'll need:

small toy — such as a block

What to do:

Show the children the toy. Hide the toy in another room, and ask the children to find it. The finder gets to hide the toy for the next game of hunting.





Move with math

“If the kids don’t have the math in their hands and bodies, it will never get into their heads!”

– Addy, pre-K inclusion classroom teacher as quoted in Big Ideas of Early Mathematics

Math doesn’t have to be quiet and reflective! Challenge children to use math thinking as you get them up and moving to wake up many areas of their brains. Movement strengthens their understanding of, and retention of, math concepts. Plus it’s FUN! Doug Clements, developer of the Building Blocks early childhood mathematics curriculum, says he wants kids “running around the classroom and bumping into mathematics at every turn.” Children learn and enjoy movement as they sing, dance, and experience math concepts and movement patterns with their whole bodies.

Try these active movement math experiences:



Shape walk

As children hold samples of a given shape—a rhombus, a triangle, a cylinder—take a walk outside and look for examples of that shape in nature and architecture. Use careful observations to determine if the real world example meets all the definitions of the shape or is “similar to” the shape.

Shape step

Make masking tape geometric shapes on the classroom floor or trace chalk shapes on a sidewalk outdoors. Challenge children to only step in a certain shape category (like a rhombus) while other children watch for accuracy. Rotate steppers and watchers. Ask children how they decided what shape to step on.





Punch right-left count

Children punch the air across their bodies. When they punch with the right fist, they shout "1" and then punch left and shout "2," alternating until the group reaches a designated total of 50 or 100 punches. This is a great way to get some movement, focus energy, and deal with restlessness while reinforcing math counting rules.



Number jump

The teacher or a child holds up a certain number of fingers (or a card with a number on it, or a display of dots) and the children jump and call out loud each number as they jump "1, 2, 3."



Number scavenger hunt

Each child finds a specific quantity of things, for example, "Everybody bring me four of the same thing" (such as four pencils, four blocks, four napkins). Give each child a number card or dot card to take with them on the hunt. Or children could be assigned different numbers based on ability. An adult can check their work or each child can self-check with the card.



People sort

Place two hoops or circles of yarn on the floor. Call up a group of children and say, "I see (say the number) children. Some are wearing socks (point to one hoop) and some are not (point to the other hoop)." Allow the children to self-select the group where they belong. Children can take turns to call some categories and check each other's work.



Obstacle course

Call out the directions as the child moves through the course as an extra reinforcement. For example, "Across the beam, through the tunnel, under the limbo stick..." The obstacle course could be a reenactment of a path from a familiar story such as Red Riding Hood going through the forest (along a plank on the ground), into the doorway (crawl under a climber), into Grandmother's room (around a swing), and through a tunnel as she escapes from the wolf.



Active Health and Physical Development Play

The Early Learning Guidelines provide information related to seven universal areas of child development and learning, called domains. One of these learning guidelines is Health and Physical Development. Activities structured to encourage children to explore their world promote coordination and strength, enhance thinking skills, and develop an “I can do it” attitude in a secure environment. When adults ensure that children’s health, physical activity, safety and nutrition needs are met, activities also contribute to the overall health and well-being of the children. Young children need indoor and outdoor space and facilities that allow them to experience a variety of developmentally appropriate physical activities. –Nebraska Early Learning Guidelines

These skills can be developed during children’s everyday, active play. Following are active play ideas that nourish health and physical development in children.

Sports in action

This activity doesn’t take any equipment, just a child’s ability to move and be creative. The leader calls out different sports skills for the children to mimic for 30 seconds each:

- Shooting and jump shot (basketball)
- Running through tires
- Batting a baseball
- Running the bases in baseball
- Running and catching a football
- Spiking or hitting a volleyball
- Swimming
- Swinging a golf club
- Juggling a soccer ball
- Dancing to a song

(Mahar et al.)

Boiling pot and other hula hoop games

Children or a leader puts five or six hula hoops in a yard or in a big room inside. Children are “safe” from the boiling pot if they are in the hula hoop circles. When the leader says go, children need to move to another circle as quickly as they can before the leader says, “Pot is boiling!” If children are not in a hoop by this time, they have to run around the hula hoop five times to get back into safety. The game can be enhanced by moving hula hoops, by taking hula hoops away, by putting them in a row so children have to jump from one hula hoop to another, by asking children to get into a certain color of hoop or to do an activity in the hoops like dance, hop, or run in place.



Snow Angels

Snow can be lots of fun! Children love to make a snow angel and to show their parents. All that is needed is to lie down in the snow and move arms and legs back and forth.

Hop, skip, and jump



Children or an adult sets up paper plates around the house or outside. Children jump from one plate to the next. Enhance the game with different color plates where children jump only on one color, or number the plates so that children can only jump on even numbers, or rearrange the plates. Children can think of many other options!

(Reimer 2014)

Bikes, trikes, or riding toy obstacle course

Bikes get the whole family outside. Families can ride together, or set up an obstacle course that the children can ride with a tricycle, bicycle, big wheels-type toy, or any other riding toy. Children like to be timed, or to play follow-the-leader through the course!



Resources

Durden, Tonia R., Jennifer K. Gerdes, Ruth E. Vonderohe, Kayla Colgrove, LaDonna Werth, Lorene Bartos, Leslie Crandall, and Carrie Miller. 2013. "Keeping Children Moving, Active, and Healthy. HEF609. 2nd Revision." Faculty Publications from CYFS. Paper 48. <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cyfsfacpub/48>

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Active Language & Literacy Play

The Early Learning Guidelines provide information related to seven universal areas of child development and learning, called domains. One of these learning guidelines is Language and Literacy Development. Language and literacy skills develop through talking, listening, playing, reading, writing, and learning the skills used to communicate. Children develop the foundation for all communication in the early childhood years. They begin with nonverbal interactions (smiling, facial expression, gestures), and then gradually move toward spoken language, sign language, or alternative communication methods to practice the rules of communication in their culture and family. Between three and five years of age, children begin to understand how oral language is reflected in written symbols (letters), and learn to create written symbols to communicate their ideas. Language and literacy development is promoted and supported through play, especially pretend play, and through music rhyme, and rhythm. –Nebraska Early Learning Guidelines

These skills can be developed during children's everyday, active play. Following are active play ideas that support language and literacy development

Backyard or swimming scrabble

The scrabble pieces are sponges. Put numbers or letters on the sponges with a permanent marker.

- Five-year-olds – find the letters of their name and put in order.
- Three-year-olds – pair up letters or numbers that match.
- Two-year-olds – find same color sponges and put in a row.



These sponges work for many more combinations, depending on the age of the child. In a swimming pool, children can find them and put in a row either on the edge of the pool or in the pool.



Water balloon splash

Fill different colors of balloons with water. Adults or children can hide them outside, and other children find one balloon at a time. They bring balloons back to a sidewalk or driveway where chalk shapes are drawn: square, rectangle, circle, triangle, diamond, or more complicated shapes for older children such as trapezoid and hexagon. The goal is for the child to name the color of the balloon they found, and to identify the shape they throw it into to make a splash! Variations can include letters or numbers for children to identify on the balloons.

Read aloud

Read aloud books, for example, the book *Ten Apples Up On Top* by Dr. Seuss. Every time the reader says "UP" the children stand and reach for the sky! There are other actions that they can do in the book, too!



Letter race

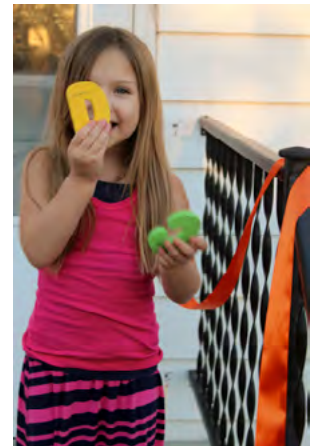
This game requires some open floor space: the more space, the better. Place letter magnets on one side of the room. Place a magnet board or a magnetic pan on the other side of the room. Children stand next to the magnet board on the opposite side of the room from all of the letters. When the leader calls out a letter and its sound, children run and find the letter, pick it up, and place it on the magnet board next to them. Make it exciting for by saying "Ready-set-go! Pick up the letter ____ that makes this sound ____!"

For five-year-olds, ask what letter makes a sound first, then when they guess it, say "Ready-set-go!"

Children can race to get the letters to spell their name. Younger children can race for the first letter of their name.

String scavenger hunt

The children follow a string from the starting point to find letters, numbers, colored plates (or white plates with colors or colored shapes). Children carry a small bag for the letters, numbers, or colored plates, and when they have followed the string to the end, they return to the start and identify what they found.



Resources

Durden, Tonia R., Jennifer K. Gerdes, Ruth E. Vonderohe, Kayla Colgrove, LaDonna Werth, Lorene Bartos, Leslie Crandall, and Carrie Miller. 2013. "Keeping Children Moving, Active, and Healthy. HEF609. 2nd Revision." Faculty Publications from CYFS. Paper 48. <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cyfsfacpub/48>

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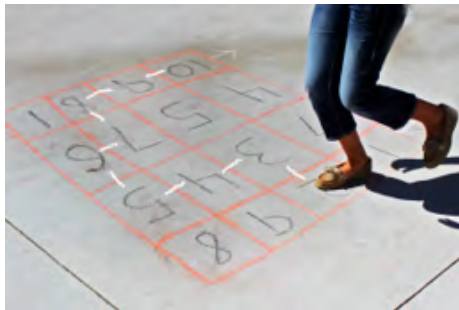
Active Mathematics Play

The Early Learning Guidelines provide information related to seven universal areas of child development and learning, called domains. One of these learning guidelines is Mathematics. Young children develop number and mathematical concepts through meaningful and active learning experiences that are broader in scope than numerals and counting. Children develop awareness of numbers, numerals, sequences, counting processes, grouping, combining, and separating. In an inclusive, developmentally-appropriate play-based environment, children have opportunities to acquire and understand mathematical skills and concepts using hands-on materials and use of numbers in real-life situations. –Nebraska Early Learning Guidelines

These skills can be developed during children’s everyday, active play. Following are active play ideas that nurture mathematics development.

Maze of numbers

The leader or children can make a maze of numbers on the floor with tape, or on cement outside with chalk. Start by drawing a grid pattern with tape or chalk. The grid needs to have 16 squares for counting to 10 for younger children, and 30-36 squares for counting to 20 with preschoolers. The numbers 1-10 or 1-20 go in each grid. One side of each square in the grid has to be touching a square with the next number in order to make the maze trail. Put random numbers in the leftover squares. Put an arrow to start and an arrow to finish. This is great way for children to recognize and practice numbers, directions, and even drive a tricycle. (Reimer 2014)



Flashlight scavenger hunt

A leader or the children hide numbers or letters made out of a durable substance such as heavy paper or plastic around a home or room. Children use a flashlight to find the numbers, take them to the leader,



and tell what number or letter they have found. As children bring back letters or numbers, they can put them in order. They can take turns hiding the numbers or letters for each other. Numbers can be in different colors so children sort them into the red pile or yellow pile. This activity can be done without flashlights, but children have more fun with flashlights whether daylight or nighttime!

Hopscotch

Adults or children make a hopscotch game with tape on the floor, or chalk on a sidewalk outside. Hopscotch is played with several players or alone. Hopscotch is a game where players toss a small object into numbered spaces of a pattern of rectangles outlined on the ground, and then hop or jump through the spaces to retrieve

the object, and then to return to the beginning. The game can be played without a small object, where a leader just calls out the number



for the child to turn around on and come back to the start. Or children can pause on a number called by the leader, continue to the end, turn around, and return to the start. The game can also be played by saying the number or numbers as children hop or jump on them. Several hopscotch grids might be necessary so each child has a turn, or each has his or her own grid.

Jump and measure

Children see how far they can jump, and then measure using a ruler or yardstick, and they can count the inches. Or, children can throw a bean bag and measure the throw. Instead of traditional measures, children can predict, then measure how many of their shoes placed end to end that it takes to where the beanbag landed.



Matching numbers

Use containers such as baskets or buckets that are numbered 1 to 10, or for preschoolers, 1 to 20. Number other objects such as balls, balloons, toys or blocks with the same numbers. Adults or children hide the objects. Children can see how fast they can objects with a certain number into the container with that number. Children can time each other or just have fun!

Resources

Durden, Tonia R., Jennifer K. Gerdes, Ruth E. Vonderohe, Kayla Colgrove, LaDonna Werth, Lorene Bartos, Leslie Crandall, and Carrie Miller. 2013. "Keeping Children Moving, Active, and Healthy. HEF609. 2nd Revision." Faculty Publications from CYFS. Paper 48. <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cyfsfacpub/48>

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Active Science Play

The Early Learning Guidelines provide information related to seven universal areas of child development and learning, called domains. One of these learning guidelines is Science. Science fosters curiosity and motivation to learn with young children, who are natural scientists. They easily become fascinated by everyday happenings. Through varied and repeated opportunities to observe, manipulate, listen to, reflect, and respond to open-ended questions, children make decisions and become higher-level thinkers. Science activities require a balance of content and process, using multi-sensory experiences. In addition to science inquiry skills, children can begin to acquire a foundation of scientific concepts and knowledge on which they can build a clear understanding of their world. –Nebraska Early Learning Guidelines

These skills can be developed during children's everyday, active play. Following are active play ideas that teach science development.

Build a snow fort

A snow fort takes a lot of energy and also skill to make the walls stay up. Children have to know how to make the snow stick together as well to form the walls. This is a good activity for children and an adult to learn together. Children can practice inside with blankets, blocks, card tables, and chairs. In this exercise, children and adults need to know if the blanket is too heavy for the chair it is tied to, or how to make components balance as they experiment.



Hike in the backyard

Hike in the backyard, park, snow, or trees. Look for bugs, leaves, plants or nature objects, and collect them in a bag. Children can use the collected items for collages, for comparisons of color and size, for how they are the same and different, for counting and examining, and to write about.

Animals in action

Children act out animal sounds and movements as a leader calls out different animals. This can be done inside or outside. Or, children can sing or chant "We're Going on a Bear Hunt" and act out the hunt. Read aloud the book *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* by Eric Carle while children act out each animal. A leader can call directions such as: Sway like a bird. Jump like a kangaroo. Wiggle like a snake. This visual imagery improves children's attention and participation as they learn vocabulary and analyze how animals move.



Play in nature

Play outdoors. With appropriate clothing, children can run through a sprinkler, play in mud, play in snow, make trails and snowmen and leaf piles. They can climb stumps of trees if not too high, and use fallen leaves to burrow.



Plant a garden

Planting flowers or a miniature garden is a great activity for children. Children can manipulate soil, fill containers, and plant in pails, flowerpots, or a small square raised garden made with boards. Group gardens work, and children also love to have their own space. Digging and soil preparation is one of the most exciting parts of gardening as children use their own plastic shovels and garden tools. Even a wooden kitchen spoon works. Once the soil is tilled and ready, children can mix in some organic compost or sphagnum peat (with a ratio of three soil to one peat). Children plant their own seeds and can water the soil, care for the garden, and fertilize soil in the upcoming weeks. Peppers and tomatoes are easy to grow and children can pick the vegetable and then eat them too.

Resources

Durden, Tonia R., Jennifer K. Gerdes, Ruth E. Vonderohe, Kayla Colgrove, LaDonna Werth, Lorene Bartos, Leslie Crandall, and Carrie Miller. 2013. "Keeping Children Moving, Active, and Healthy. HEF609. 2nd Revision." Faculty Publications from CYFS. Paper 48. <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cyfsfacpub/48>

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Let's take a walk

Taking children on a walk is such an easy activity, especially when the weather is warm. If you stop and think about it, a lot of great learning can take place on a simple walk around the block, the facility, or out in the play yard.

Children learn best through their senses: things they can see, smell, hear, feel, and taste. It's often the little things that adults take for granted that make great learning times for young children— hearing the wind blow, smelling flowers, feeling raindrops, catching a snowflake, running through a pile of fall leaves. Make plans for your next walk with the children. They will be thrilled to learn lots of new things as they enjoy the outdoors.

Take a bird walk

As you get children ready, tell them to watch and listen for birds as they go on their walk. You may want to take along a piece of paper to count the number of birds you see. Point out big birds and little birds, flying birds and sitting birds, birds high in the air and close to the ground. Notice and compare the colors of the birds you see. Listen to birds singing. Does one bird sound like another? Ask the children to try to make the same sounds they hear from the birds. Can you find bird nests in the trees or on the ground? Depending on the time of year, you may find eggs on the ground that have dropped out of nests.

If the children really enjoyed their bird walk, they may like to learn more about birds when you're back indoors.

- Set out paper, markers, and crayons for them to draw birds.
- Put on music for them to spread their wings and fly to the music.
- Pick out books about birds and read them to the children.
- Make bird feeders by cutting the top off a milk or juice carton and filling the bottom with birdseed. Hang your feeders outside near a window where the children can watch the birds coming to eat.
- In spring, help the children find scraps of yarn or string, dry grass, and lint from the clothes dryer to set outside in the yard for birds to use as they build their nests.

Signs of spring walk

Take the children for a walk at the end of winter to look for signs of spring. Have the children look for melting snow, birds making nests, leaf buds on trees, and plants poking up through the ground. What other changes do the children see? Listen for birds singing. You may get lucky and hear some geese honking as they return to their homes in the north. Can the children feel the air is getting warmer from the sun?

If the children really enjoyed looking for signs of spring, here are a few additional activities for spring.

- Have the children draw pictures of things they saw on their walk. In a few days, you may like to go on the same walk to see if anything has changed.
- Go on a walk again and take along a ruler, pencil, and paper. Measure the size of some of the little plants you see coming up out of the ground. Write down where you found them and how tall the plants are. Go back in a week to measure the plants again to see if they are taller.
- Read books about spring and changes in nature.
- Have the children plant some seeds in pots so they can watch them grow.

Walks are great times for learning.

Think about what children can see, smell, hear, feel, and taste on a walk.

Great finds walk

This is a walk to have the children see what “treasures” they can find. Give each child a paper bag and tell him to look for things that have fallen to the ground, like pine cones, leaves, seeds, nuts, stones, sticks, etc. The children can bring their treasures back to child care. Tell the children not to pull leaves off trees or to pick blooming flowers out of people’s yards.

When you return from your walk, give each child a spot where they can dump out their bags to show everyone the “treasures” they found. If you have a magnifying glass, show children how to use it to look closely at the things they found.

- They may like to use their “treasures” to make art projects, such as gluing leaves on paper.
- Nuts, sticks, pinecones, and stones are fun to play with. Put some out for pretend play or to fill trucks and dump out.
- Have children sort nuts, leaves, pinecones, stones, etc. into piles. Put all the leaves that look alike into one pile. Find all the acorns with caps. Sort the sticks by size, smallest to biggest.

Creature walk

Tell the children to look for living creatures as you go on your walk. These could be pets, birds, insects, and wild animals such as rabbits or squirrels. Look for signs of animals, such as dog houses, holes in trees, birds’ nests, ant hills, etc. Look for footprints and tracks in the mud or snow. Look for big creatures and little creatures. Watch how they move and how they eat. Do they make any sounds? Listen for rustling bushes, pecking on wood, and flapping wings.

When you return from your walk, have the children try to name all the creatures they saw.

- They may want to draw pictures of their favorite creatures.
- Find books about pets, wild animals, birds, and insects to read to the children.
- Let children talk about their pets and how they take care of them.
- Go through old magazines to find pictures of creatures. Let the children cut them out and paste them on paper to make a creature collage.

House walk

If you are in or near a residential area, a walk to look at different houses in the neighborhood. Look at the colors of houses, the windows, and roofs. Does the house have a porch? Garage? Chimney?

Talk about whether the house looks like anything special to the children, such as a castle, a barn, a house in a story. Can you tell anything about the people who live in the house? Do you think children live there? Pets? Count things on houses. How many windows do you see? How many doors or trees around the house?

When you return from your walk, the children may like to think about houses some more.

- Give them paper to draw their own house or a house they would like to live in.
- They may like to build houses with the blocks. Add some little people, small cars, etc. to go with their block houses.
- Read stories about houses.
- Look for stories about houses in other countries to read to the children. Make sure they have pictures!
- Give children shoeboxes and old magazines. Have them cut out pictures of furniture for different rooms in a house. They may like to glue all the bedroom furniture in one box, all the kitchen things in another, etc.
- If a new house or building is being built in the neighborhood, the children may like to take a walk to see it.