
BACK TO BASICS

Physical development

All children need stimulating, safe, and healthy environments, nutritious meals, routine medical care, and adults to guide, support, and maximize the potential of a child's physical development. Consider these ideas and activities, adjusting the age ranges according to the specific needs of the children in your care.

Infants

- Maintain daily records of feedings, diaper changes, and behaviors—and share these with parents.
- Observe and record significant milestones like tooth eruptions, rolling over, social interactions, interests, and discoveries. Use these to plan the environment and appropriate developmental activities.
- Provide flat woven rugs that pad the floor but allow for vigorous physical movement like rolling, reaching, and kicking.
- Encourage self-feeding with appropriate finger foods.

- Place objects just out of an infant's reach to encourage creeping, reaching, and grasping.
- Provide low, sturdy furnishings that can be used for pulling up and balancing.
- Develop a routine for washing, cleaning, and sanitizing materials, equipment, and surfaces.

Toddlers

- Make a daily safety check of indoor and outdoor activity areas.
- Offer activities that stimulate all the senses. Have conversations that help toddlers describe and understand their experiences.
- Encourage tooth brushing after snacks and meals. Help children use their own soft brushes and water (no toothpaste).
- Offer opportunities for safe crawling, walking, and climbing.
- Work with families to introduce and refine toilet learning.

PHOTO BY SUSAN GAETZ



-
- Set up a doctor's office in the dramatic play area to help children become more comfortable with routine medical interactions. Include a scale and height chart so children can measure their own physical changes.
 - Provide textured surfaces to vary walking experiences.
 - Introduce the names of body parts and encourage investigations of strength, control, coordination, and balance.
 - Play walking games and stomp, hop, tiptoe, quick step, and move in slow motion.
 - Use a long piece of lumber as a balance beam. Encourage children to walk and jump.
 - Introduce and support investigations of musical instruments—violin, piano, or cello—that demand fine motor precision.
 - Anticipate independence in most self-help skills, but be prepared to assist when children are frustrated by a stuck zipper, for example.
 - Offer routine tools that refine small muscle skills like scissors, pencils, tweezers, weaving looms, and sewing or knitting needles.
 - Plan games and activities that focus on pedestrian and bicycling safety.
 - Cheer the loss of baby teeth and the eruption of permanent ones. Use the opportunity to reinforce good dental habits including flossing. ■

Preschoolers

- Provide daily opportunities for physical play outdoors—slides, ladders, cargo nets, A-frames, balance beams, wheel toys, and balls.
- Explore games that involve jumping, hopping, skipping, running, and climbing.
- Use large hollow blocks as stepping stones to the playground.
- Place a ladder on the floor and practice walking between and on the rungs.
- Jump over puddles after a rain shower.
- Dance to different styles and tempos of music.
- Provide opportunities and materials to refine fine motor skills—markers, paintbrushes, scissors, keyboards, and pegboards.
- Practice self-help skills like hand washing, tooth brushing, buttoning, zipping up a zipper, tying shoes, and turning faucet levers.
- Have routine conversations at meals about nutrition, food types and cooking techniques, textures, and tastes.
- Send class notes and cards to children who are sick. Have conversations with children about ways to stay healthy.

School-agers

- Play games that encourage balance—standing on one foot, balancing on one foot with eyes closed, changing feet with eyes closed.
- Offer safe opportunities to use large muscles like climbing trees, jumping rope, running on hills, rolling tires, riding bikes, and flying kites.
- Practice walking on balance beams, logs, pipes, the edges of a low wall, or a curb.