



## overview

Your classroom or home environment sets the stage for physical activity. You can encourage children to be more active by making times for physical activity visible on the schedule in a way that children know when to expect their next break. You can set out new and exciting active materials each week to keep children engaged and encourage them to select active options during their free-choice time. Additionally, you can create an active culture in your early care and education space by using everyday materials that promote physical activity, such as posters of active kids and books about physical activity in your reading area.

Children learn by exploring and children of all ages need time to be physically active both indoors and outdoors. Creating supportive indoor and outdoor environments will promote physical activity and greatly influence gross motor outcomes for children. Think about your classrooms, play spaces and outdoor areas, and where you can encourage more physical activity. Structure activities and environments so children of all ages can actively explore, learn, and practice gross motor skills.

## Child-Provider Interactions and Your Role as a Provider

- Familiarize yourself with developmentally-appropriate practices and the sequence of physical and motor development. Also, know which resources are available to you and seek out new resources
- Model and participate in physical activity, and dress to be active
- Observe and record children’s development so you can help them expand their skill sets
- Set the pace for activity so all children in your program are included
- Understand that movement and physical activity overlap with social-emotional development. Your interactions with children regarding their physical and gross motor development will have an impact on other areas of their development

*“Anything we introduce with enthusiasm and fun always excites the children. There is the occasional child who says they do not want to participate, but they always join in eventually.”*

– Maggie Smith, R.E.A.L. K.I.D.S, Menominee



## special considerations for family child care providers

If you are a family child care provider, your physical activity environment will depend on whether your living space is used for child care or if you use a separate space for your program.

**Indoors.** If you care for children in your home, think about arranging furniture to define spaces, and identify an area for music and movement. There should be plenty of space for children to jump, skip, gallop, use push-and-pull toys, and throw soft objects. Think about how opportunities for physical activity occur naturally in your home, such as stairs for climbing, hallway spaces that can be used as “bowling alleys” and even chairs and couches that serve as support for children learning to stand and walk. Consider using portable equipment so you can rotate materials as the children’s interests, abilities, and developmental stages evolve. Use tubs and shelving to store materials so your home can serve as a supportive environment for children’s physical development as well as a home for you and your own family.

**Outdoors.** Children need opportunities to explore nature, so consider landscaping that includes trees for shade, large rocks for climbing, hills for rolling down and climbing up, and gardens for digging and planting. Accompany these natural features with developmentally appropriate equipment, such as slides and swings, as well as push-pull toys and tricycles. This will present children with a variety of experiences in traveling skills, balancing skills, and manipulating skills.

## considerations for all ages

Here are some tips for setting up active indoor and outdoor spaces:

- Your space should be **safe, clean, neat, and clutter free**
- Arrange your space so that it is **easy** for you to **supervise** all children. This way you will know if children are being active and if you need to encourage more movement
- Create a space that **purposefully promotes physical activity**. Set aside plenty of space to practice large muscle skills
- Provide **free access** to physical activity and movement materials. This will encourage children to initiate their own physical activity
- **Set clear expectations for behavior**. Model appropriate behaviors so children understand how to act and know how to use available materials and equipment
- Some materials and equipment will be more popular with children than others, so have more than one available. Store these items where children can gain access to them

### Indoor Space

- Provide **clear traffic patterns**. Set up furniture in certain ways, or place footprints on the floor to demonstrate where to walk
- Choose **developmentally appropriate materials** to set out in your room. If children seem uninterested in a material, it may be too challenging or not challenging enough. Don’t be afraid to try something else
- Hang up posters of diverse, active families, and keep books in your reading area that show children dancing, moving, and playing games
- Make sure lighting is sufficient for children to see and that materials absorb sound to limit noise levels

### Outdoor Space

- Make sure there is lots of **variation in the materials and equipment** available outside. For example, make sure there are **different types of surfaces**, such as a paved bike path, a cushioned surface beneath climbing areas, and grassy spaces for running
- Provide **both portable and fixed materials**. For example, stationary and movable tunnels. This will encourage children to practice a variety of gross motor skills
- Ensure access to plenty of **natural materials**. For example, have rocks to climb on, hills to roll down, and a garden to tend
- Ensure access to **drinking water**
- Provide a **shaded or covered area** to protect children from the sun, rain, or snow

## quick tip

**Go outside in the winter** or even in light rain! Fresh air—even in winter—benefits children. Licensing rules in Wisconsin define “inclement weather” as stormy or severe weather, including any of the following elements:

- Heavy rain
- Temperatures above 90 degrees Fahrenheit
- Wind chills of 0 degrees Fahrenheit or below for children age 2 and above
- Wind chills of 20 degrees Fahrenheit or below for children under age 2

# infants

Provide space for infants who are mobile and younger infants who are not yet mobile. This provides a safe space for all infants to explore their environments in their own ways.

- Infants who are not yet walking should have space and time to move their arms and legs freely while awake
- Infants crawling and walking should have enough space and supports (e.g., furniture) to help them pull themselves up and balance

- Outfit your outdoor space with appropriately scaled equipment, including equipment infants can use for support and push-pull toys for walking infants
- Provide a variety of surfaces for all infants to explore
- The outdoor environment should encourage infants to guide their own active exploration
- During tummy time, place attractive materials just out of reach to encourage young infants to practice reaching

- Structure more exploratory activities as infants grow, such as climbing in and out of low cardboard boxes or rolling beach balls for batting and kicking
- Have one-on-one time with all infants to encourage gross motor skills. Be sure the environment provides infants with opportunities to repeatedly practice their developing skills

## activity idea

### Tunneling to Toys

Set up a collapsible tunnel or create your own using a large cardboard box open on both ends with the flaps taped out of the way. Position an infant who is practicing and close to mastering crawling at one end of the tunnel. Place a favorite toy at the other end and wait there, providing encouragement all the way!

**Equipment:** Child's favorite toy, a collapsible tunnel (or cardboard box)

**Time Frame:** 5 to 10 minutes or until interest is lost

**Adaptations:** Try adjusting the length of the tunnel

## toddlers

Make your indoor space for toddlers an area they want to actively explore. Bring materials into the space that promote gross motor skills while providing a variety of sensory experiences.

- Provide plenty of room for toddlers to practice their emerging traveling skills. A small climber with a wooden slide and stairs or a sit-and-spin make great additions to your indoor space. Not only does this equipment encourage exploration, but you can easily disinfect the nonporous surfaces
- Bring in balls that are of different textures, sizes, weights, and colors. Balls, bean bags and scarves will encourage toddlers to practice skills such as throwing and tossing
- Introduce movement into other areas of your classroom by bringing in natural objects, such as pinecones and leaves, for your sensory table. You can link these objects to the outdoors by taking an afternoon hike through the neighborhood or to a nearby park

### quick tip

To ensure children get enough physical activity in the winter months, make getting dressed to go outdoors part of the physical activity. Sing songs or do stretches between putting on mittens. Get creative!

“One of my teachers came to me this week to tell me how wonderful the new climber is in her classroom. She told me that in the two weeks it has been in use, she has noticed a drastic difference in the amount of time she spends on redirecting her 2 ½-year-old children. She said they are all much calmer now that they have a designed active area in her classroom.”

– Nancy Karn, Kids Depot, Madison

- Provide time for toddlers to actively explore the outdoor environment on their own
- Make sure there are a variety of surfaces for practicing different gross motor skills. Locate a solid surface for push-and-pull toys and a grassy area for running and hopping
- Provide plenty of size-appropriate materials and promote various gross motor skills, such as low-riding toys that toddlers can push with their feet and climbers that are not too high
- Store materials in a low space easily accessible to toddlers
- If you share an outdoor space with other age groups, try to secure some time for toddlers to explore on their own



### activity idea

#### Hop and Jump like Betsy

Read the book *Hop, Jump* by Ellen Walsh. The children jump forward in a variety of ways (short, quick jumps, long jumps, and high jumps). Next, the children hop using one foot, then the other. Next, the children leap. Finally, the children do all of these movements in any order they choose!

**Materials:** The book *Hop, Jump*

**Time Frame:** 10 to 15 minutes

**Adaptations:** Switch up the order. Adjust the amount of space for children

“Children who did not have the confidence to participate in physical outdoor play enjoy the active indoor centers. The limited number of children and open-ended activities build their confidence, their strength, their activity levels. Teachers have noticed that children are more focused during group time and less classroom management seems to be needed. Indoor active centers allow children to release some of their energy in a positive manner.”

– Linda Groom, Hudson Community Children’s Center, Hudson

## quick tip

How active can you make your dramatic play area? Provide materials for children to be active in their imaginative play. For example, they could pretend to be an aerobics or yoga teacher or act out a story such as the *Three Little Pigs*.

## preschoolers and older children

Preschool-age and older children need time indoors and outdoors for gross motor play. The environment of each of the spaces will influence gross motor outcomes. Take time to plan your environments so they incorporate physical activity and gross motor skills in every way possible.

- Consider art projects that encourage children to draw while kneeling on the ground. It will help them develop their low-level balancing skills on hands and knees
- Add books about physical activity to your reading library. Read books together and give children the opportunity to act out the story
- Bring physical activity to life in the dramatic play area
- Give children options to pretend they are athletes, yoga teachers, or fictional characters
- Create a music and movement interest area. Locate the area close to an electrical outlet so music can be played. Provide instruments that make more music with more movement, such as tambourines and maracas
- Place pictures and names of materials on shelves to show children where materials belong
- Provide a variety of equipment outdoors to promote traveling skills, balancing skills and manipulative skills. Incorporate both natural and structural elements to give children a variety of experiences in learning gross motor skills

- Engage children in teacher-led activities indoors and outdoors, and plan challenging games and activities
- Join in activity as much as possible to model skills, such as shooting a basketball or running backward

## activity idea

### Balance Low, Balance High

As a group, explore balancing at both high and low levels. Challenge each other to balance as steadily as possible for as long as possible. High-level positions include standing on tiptoe, on one flat foot; on tiptoes with both feet and knees bent; on tiptoes with eyes closed; and on one foot on tiptoes. Low-level positions include balancing on two hands and one knee, one hand and two knees, one hand and one knee, bottom only, knees only and one knee only.

**Equipment:** Ideas for balancing!

**Time Frame:** 5 to 10 minutes

**Adaptations:** Offer the different variations to challenge children but also make the activity fun for everyone

– From *Healthy Movement & Active Play*

## multi-age groups

Supportive indoor and outdoor environments for multi-age groups should accommodate children of different physical abilities. Promote positive interactions between children of all ages so they continue to learn from one another. Join children in physical activity whenever possible.

## inclusion

To ensure that learning experiences are rich and beneficial to all children, including those with developmental disabilities, you may need to adapt the environment to suit individual needs. If a child has an individualized education plan (IEP) or individualized family service plan (IFSP), use it as a helpful tool in making meaningful adaptations.

Carefully assess your environment through the eyes of each child in your class, including those with developmental disabilities. Position yourself at the children's height and carefully examine every feature of your environment. This will help you understand how to adapt your environment.



For example, make sure materials and equipment are within reach of all children. Place heavier objects lower to the ground and place lighter physical activity materials, such as scarves or bean bags, on higher shelves.

Think about how space is defined. Is there enough room for all the children? If a child uses a walker or wheelchair, can they use the same traffic patterns as the other children? Are the boundaries of the space clearly defined? If not, use tape or fixed features in the room to create a well-defined space for movement and physical activity. Remove both large and small obstacles.

Ensure that equipment and materials can be used by all children in your care. If you notice that a child is having trouble using a ball, think of ways to make it easier. Try textured balls. Try balls of different sizes or weights. Let children master rolling, throwing and catching with equipment that is easier to use and can help the child be successful.

Child-provider interactions are just as important for children with special needs. Take the time to make sure activities are understood and are accessible. This may mean positioning yourself so that a child can see your lips moving while you speak or that you are close enough to help support their movement. This will create positive association with physical activity.

## cultural competency

Creating accessible environments for the children in your care means considering their culture when selecting materials and equipment. Include games and activities that children play at home with their

families. Make sure materials such as books and posters represent all children in your care.

How can you show honor and respect for your children's cultural backgrounds? Invite parents to lead physical activities and encourage children to share physical activity materials and books from their homes. This will also help children develop an awareness of diverse cultures while learning new and exciting activities.

## engaging families

Take time to communicate how the home or classroom has been structured to promote physical activity. Relate these changes to ways parents could change their home environments to promote physical activity. It can be done in a newsletter, at a parent conference or even during daily drop-offs and pick-ups.

## quick tip

Try pulling the plug on your home television and computer! Over time, observe the changes you see in children's behaviors!

## engaging communities

Encourage your community to build neighborhood playgrounds to increase access for families. Look at the tools and resources provided by Kaboom!, an organization with a mission to create great play spaces within walking distance of every child in America through the participation and leadership of communities.

### ADAPTING EQUIPMENT

- Provide a variety of balls, including different sizes, weights and textures
- Have scoops or EZ catches available
- Use Velcro to adapt materials so they are easier to handle
- Use larger equipment, such as bigger bean bags, or a wider balance beam or board