

# Meaningful movement



**Tania Swift** presents activities and ideas to promote key aspects of young children's physical development...



**A**ccording to government guidelines and British Heart Foundation recommendations, it is important for children from walking to five years old to be physically active on a daily basis for a minimum of 180 minutes. But in what way should children be active, and how can practitioners create exciting physical activities that help young children to develop whilst also encouraging them to engage and love being on the move?

Children should be able to explore the environment and choose what they do for a large part of their day, developing skills naturally. However, well-planned, adult-led activities will enhance their development. These activities should be interesting for children in order for them to want to engage

but they should be interesting and fun for practitioners too, as this makes for a better experience for everyone.

There are many schemes of work and resources available for early years practitioners to follow; however, it is important to start with the basics and to provide activities that work for the children in your care. Practitioners need to be aware of the skills that children in early years need to be able to achieve, and then help them to do so. The most effective way to do this is to plan around the basic physical skills, for example, jumping, crawling, bending, galloping, skipping and catching. Children also need to learn social skills such as taking turns, working in pairs and following rules. Knowledge of these crucial skills is gained through education and supportive resources but also through daily

experiences. If a whole group of three-year-olds can jump and one cannot, then it will be obvious that that particular child will require additional support for that skill. If you have not planned around jumping and do not focus on that basic skill, there is the potential that you might take it for granted that all children can jump.

Identify three or four skills a week and plan activity based on these skills on a daily basis; they can be incorporated into known activities, used individually for simple sessions throughout the week, to create wild and wonderful active stories (they don't have to be best sellers!), and to make up new games and activities based on a combination of skills.

## Known activities

Not all exciting new activities need to be created from scratch - just add new layers to activities children already know...

### TRAFFIC LIGHT GAME

Add new colours and link them to the skills of the week - e.g. yellow could mean children should skip over the zebra crossing, while pink could mean they should leap over the speed bumps.

### SIMON SAYS

Incorporate the skills of the week into Simon Says to give it more of a focus. Simon Says can also be used to create a body awareness activity, which is a really important. If children are unaware of how their bodies fit together, they will struggle with spatial awareness.

### ACTIVE STORIES

Active stories and games build motor skills while encouraging imagination, creativity and language skills. They are particularly useful for when you care for a group with a variety of abilities or ages.

Active stories could be based on:

- Animals - in the wild or at the zoo.
- Everyday activities - e.g. cleaning the house or going shopping.
- Adventures - e.g. pirates on the high seas or astronauts going to the moon.
- Fantasy - from fairies and princesses, to knights and dragons.
- The weather - the different seasons and elements.
- Familiar tales - from popular books.

You can incorporate any move or skill you want to into your stories. For example, on a jungle adventure, you could bend under branches, wiggle out of brambles, jump over streams, gallop up the hill, roll down the other side, stretch up to reach for the squirrels, leap from stepping stone to stepping stone in the river, and then creep through the bushes.

You can also create stories with help and suggestions from the children. Ask them questions such as:

- What animal shall we be today? (E.g. tiger)
- Where do we live? (E.g. jungle)
- What do we like to do? (E.g. climb trees, run up the hill, etc.)
- What do we eat?

Encourage children to think about how they have been moving that week (the skills) and to think how the moves would fit into the story. This can be too complicated for some children so some guidance is often helpful.

**Children will grow and **develop** if they're left to their own devices in an **enriching** environment, but they need a variety of **challenges****



### NOW DANCE!

Once you've created and acted out a story, why not create a dance to go with it? Ask children to help you identify music that matches the story and then to create moves to go with the music. Incorporate the skills of the week into the dance. This is great for gross motor development. It can be done inside or outside and should be very energetic.

### Creating new activities

Of course, it can be fun to come up with entirely new ways of getting children moving. Try the following suggestions...

#### OBSTACLE COURSES

Children can:

- **Jump, hop or leap** from spot to spot
- **Bend down** to pick up a ball
- **Roll** a ball between two cones
- **Creep, crawl** through a box or tunnel
- **Pencil roll** along a mat

You could also add a fine motor aspect into your obstacle courses, e.g. threading beads or using large tweezers to move fluffy balls from one container to another. This will help children who find it difficult to sit down and focus on fine motor activities at other times.

#### ACTIVE CUBE

For this activity you'll need an 'active cube' (with clear pockets), plus 'skill cards' and 'number cards'. Place a different movement skill (e.g. skip, hop, wiggle, etc.) behind a number in each of the cube's pockets. Throw the cube and ask all children to say the number that is facing up. Then pull the movement card out and say the movement that is face up. Finally, ask the children to do the movement the amount of times dictated by the number card.

This game can also be played with animal cards. Identify animals that move in ways you would like the children to move that week.

#### MUSICAL MOVEMENT

Select music that changes tempo such as a favourite nursery rhyme or piece of classical music. Encourage children to move to the tempo and volume levels (faster with faster tempos, reaching high if music is loud or high pitched, and low if music is soft or low pitched).

Once children have grasped the concept of moving to the music, add in skills, for example:

- **skip** when a particular sound is made, and **wiggle**

when a different sound is made, etc.;  
■ **skip** faster or slower depending on the tempo, etc.

### Pre-walkers

Many movement skills can be incorporated into a baby's day alongside encouraging the important developmental stages of crawling and then walking...

#### TUMMY TIME

Babies need to spend time on their tummies to develop their muscles and support the development of head control. This also provides many more benefits such as visual development and body awareness, which are important for fine motor skills.

#### CRAWLING

There are many benefits of crawling that babies will miss out on if they skip this important development stage:

- Gross motor development - crawling helps to strengthen the shoulders, back and core muscles (these muscles need to be strong to support writing).
- Fine motor development - crawling helps to strengthen muscles in the hand (which are needed for fine motor tasks).
- Supports bilateral coordination of arms and legs (which is intrinsic for writing).
- Children need to scan their environment with their eyes before moving (we need developed hand-eye coordination to be able to draw and write).

#### SKILLS

We can support babies to achieve simple skills - e.g. *dance, stretch, jump, creep, spin, wiggle, roll and bend*. They will gradually be able to attempt more skills as they grow.

**Tania Swift is director of B Inspired.**

### FIND OUT MORE

**B Inspired specialises in training and resources that support early years practitioners to deliver a high-quality physical development programme.**

**Mini Moves is a useful resource that**

- supports**
- practitioners to**
- deliver skill-based**
- activities. Its other**
- resources include**
- Mini Yo! cards and**
- Fantastic Elastic.**
- For further**
- information, visit**
- binspireduk.co.uk**
- or email**
- info@binspireduk.co.uk**

