

YoungStar Movement and Learning Tip Sheet

"We have spent years and resources struggling to teach people to learn, and yet the standardized achievement test scores go down and illiteracy rises. Could it be that one of the key elements we've been missing is simply movement?"
- Hannaford

The Basics: How does physical activity enhance children's learning?

Although movement serves as a primary medium for young children's learning, the motor, cognitive, emotional and social developmental domains are interrelated.¹ When a child's earliest learning is based on motor skill development, all other learning is too because:

- Movement and rhythm stimulate the brain (frontal lobes) and enrich language and motor development.
- Movement contributes to the enhancement of a positive self-image, self-confidence, creativity, and self-expression.
- Movement stimulates the learning process and promotes physical fitness and development of the whole child.
- Children learn experientially – through play, experimentation, exploration and discovery. The brain actually changes as a result of experience.² In order for children's brains to function optimally, they must have experiences that produce and strengthen brain connections.

Howard Gardner presented that we each possess eight different kinds of intelligence, to greater or lesser degrees and in varying combinations. He designated the **bodily/kinesthetic** as a type of intelligence, and asserts that individuals can learn and know with their bodies or body parts. Movement promotes this kind of intelligence. It enhances spatial intelligence and can help develop the musical, logical/mathematical, linguistic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal intelligences.

Active Early

Active Early: A Wisconsin Guide for Improving Physical Activity is a tool that has been developed to promote language and literacy development along with physical activity in early care and education programs. For more information, visit <https://dpi.wi.gov/community-nutrition/cacfp/wellness/active-early-healthy-bites>.

The Active Early guide can be used by early care and education professionals to identify and implement strategies and policies to help staff improve the physical activity and nutrition practices in their classrooms and family child care settings.

Child care providers can enhance learning for the whole child by making motion a daily, positive experience, incorporating movement throughout stories, transition, pretend play, and encouraging children to be imaginative and physically active.

Literacy and Language Arts

"Songs, movement, and musical games are 'brilliant neurological exercises' vital to intellectual development. By combining rhythmic movement with speech and song, young children are given an opportunity to further develop their minds, particularly in the areas of "inner speech" and "impulse control," which contribute to language development, self-management, and social skills." - Coulter

One of the keys to implementing change is first understanding how pre-literacy skills and language development opportunities are delivered in programming.

Language development refers to the process of learning to speak and communicate. Language development is linked to physical development. Knowing the words that describe the body, types of movement, intensity, direction and spatial relationships help children learn, practice and master skills.

The strategies outlined below can be used to engage children in learning that incorporates movement.

Use movement and active learning to promote emergent literacy by exploring how words – when physically demonstrated - take on meaning:

- Prepositions – over, under, around, through, beside, and near objects
- Rhythm of words – clapping, or tapping or moving in cadence with a poem - children hear and feel the rhythm of words
- Spatial orientation – useful for letter identification and orientation of letters on a page, children moving in a room from left-right or top-bottom learning directional sense or showing the differences from high to low positions with words of shrink, melt, collapse, shrivel
- Demonstrate words – stomp, pounce, stalk, slither, smooth, strong, gentle, enormous – action words or descriptive words have more relevance
- Adverbs and Adjectives – slow walk or skip lightly – children learn the meaning in both body and mind
- Communication – playing together gives opportunity to speak and listen to each other
- Stringing actions to form sequences – choosing components that flow naturally (beginning, pause, and ending) – linking words to form sentences and paragraphs
- Acting out words in a poem, story, lyrics – Children learn to use multiple senses – more learned and retained
- Left and Right Brain Communications – physical activity/movement provides opportunities to cross the body midline – integration of the brain’s hemispheres is essential to the ability to read and write
- Opposite verbs – open and close and using various tempos, alternating opening and closing – hand muscle strengthening activity

Infants
Long before young children begin to form speech, infants soak in the sights and sounds around them that are essential to language development. As you touch and move infants and encourage physical activity, talking to them continuously is important.
Toddlers
As toddlers learn new words, they need context to accompany those words and adults may find that they need context to understand the words the toddler is using. Build from simple vocabulary and extend language as children grow. Model what new words mean so toddlers have the context needed to add the words to their own speech.
Preschoolers
Preschoolers learn new words at an amazing rate. They will use words they are familiar with to expand, increase and explore their vocabulary. The more they can see adults model the meaning of words, the more they are able to use these words themselves. Additionally, preschoolers learn grammar at the same time as vocabulary, so they are better able to understand and follow instructions that include more than one step.

“As far as intellectual functioning is concerned, we have generally associated schooling with sitting motionless at a desk for long stretches of time. But mental functioning is connected with bodily expression & dependent upon it. If this necessary cycle is broken, a child’s senses will suffer & he will remain on a lower level of mental & sensory functioning.”
– Lynch-Fraser

¹ Gabbard, C.P. (2008). Lifelong motor development (5th Ed.). Englewood Cliffs, N.J.:Allyn & Bacon.

²Shore, R. (1997). Rethinking the brain. New insights into early development. New York, NY: Families and Work Institute.