



Quality ChildCare

For Registered Home-Based Providers

LEARNING TO GROW ★ WINDWARD COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Vol. IX, No. 3

10 Hallmarks of Quality Child Care

- ★ Build trusting relationships
- ★ Provide consistent care
- ★ Support children's health
- ★ Provide a safe environment
- ★ Provide positive guidance
- ★ Provide a language-rich environment
- ★ Foster curiosity and development through play
- ★ Individualize care and learning activities
- ★ Partner with parents
- ★ Pursue personal and professional growth

This Month's Hallmark of Quality Child Care

Individualize Care and Learning Activities

Active Play for Learning

“Ready, set, go!” This common phrase at the start of children's movement games could be the battle cry for learning. As stated in G. Connell and C. McCarthy's book, *A Moving Child is a Learning Child: How the Body Teaches the Brain to Think*, every move a young child makes, whether intentional or accidental, develops physical capabilities while building sensory perceptions and critical pathways in the brain for thinking and learning.

During active play and movement, young children use:

- the familiar senses of sight, hearing, and touch
- the important internal sense of balance and movement, known as the **vestibular system**.

The vestibular system coordinates with other senses, especially vision, to help us maintain our balance whether we're still or moving.

During the early years, movement experiences support a child's developing vestibular system. The brain's priority is movement which becomes “automated” (such as being able to walk and talk). Young children are learning to control large and small muscle movements. Their need to move, wiggle and touch serves to wake up their brain to stay alert, listen and learn. Therefore, it's normal for young children to have difficulty maintaining a still position, such as sitting with legs crossed and hands on their lap, as this is one of the most advanced demonstration of a mature vestibular system.

Being able to sit still, pay attention and listen are often described as important school readiness skills. The vestibular system is foundational to all of these. This newsletter will discuss ways to support children's vestibular system development at each age level – infants, toddlers and preschoolers, and present active play movement ideas for each age group.



Infants

An infant's initial movements are unconscious movements governed by primitive reflexes, such as a newborn tightly grasping the caregiver's finger when it is placed in her palm. Voluntary control of these reflexive movements develop as the infant learns about her body from sensory stimulation and movement. The hearing nerve pathways are more mature at birth than the visual pathways. Infants need stimulation of their vestibular system to develop their:

- head, neck and body strength and control
- balance and vision which are interdependent.

You can support an infant's vestibular system and development by:

- Supporting the infant's head and trunk as you gently dance and sing to music.
- Rocking the infant on your outstretched legs while you are sitting on the floor so she is alternately lying back on your legs (with her feet against your stomach) and standing up; hold her hands and gently stand her up as you rock your body backwards and bend your knees to assist. Try this with an infant who can lift her head while lying on her back and can bear weight on her legs, around 6 months of age.
- Sitting the infant facing you on your leg(s) while you're sitting and gently bouncing her up and down or side-to-side to the rhythm of a song or nursery rhyme. Provide support at her trunk or hips as needed. Try this with an infant who is beginning to sit independently around 5-7 months of age.



Toddlers

For toddlers, learning about the world is all about doing. It is natural for them to move their bodies in accordance with their emotions. Just as toddlers experience “big” feelings, they need to participate in big, whole body movements, such as running and jumping. They engage with their environments in a very active, kinesthetic (hands-on) way. This means that a toddler needs safe spaces and lots of opportunities to move and explore. When fully engaged in a physical activity, the brain and body are in-sync. In other words, “mindfulness in action.” Active play providing input to the vestibular system helps toddlers develop:

- physical coordination for gross and fine motor activities
- emotional regulation for attending and learning.

You can support a toddler's vestibular system and development by:

- Using rhythm sticks or wooden spoons to bang on an upside-down container or bucket. Ask the toddler, “How do you bang the sticks when you're happy? Mad? Excited?”
- Modeling and incorporating new movement patterns as you move along with a fun song together, such as “The Floor is Lava” (for lyrics refer to The Kiboomers Kids Music Channel on YouTube).
- Creating a simple obstacle course with large boxes to crawl through, hula hoops to jump into and wide tape to walk across while balancing.

Preschoolers

As children gain more motor and language skills, they learn to translate their physical explorations of the world into thinking, problem-solving and learning. Vestibular stimulation (movement) has a positive effect on speech-language development as the hearing system works closely with the vestibular system. In a 2022 study published by *Educational Psychology Review*, researchers found that integrating whole-body movements into learning the alphabet improves children's ability to recall letter-sounds, a foundational skill for reading.

Furthermore, according to Eric Jensen's *Teaching with the Brain in Mind*, many scientists link the lack of vestibular stimulation with learning problems including reading, language and math. When sensory-motor systems are stimulated during learning activities children have shown:

- better attention and listening skills
- improved reading scores and writing skills.

Active play fuels the brain with oxygen and triggers the release of brain chemicals that boost the cells of the brain to communicate and form connections with each other.



You can support a preschooler's vestibular system and development by:

- Providing open-ended materials that they can actively manipulate (e.g. construct and deconstruct).
- Pairing movement with imitating letter-sounds (e.g. moving like a snake while hissing "sss" sound).
- Providing opportunity (e.g. swinging, spinning) or materials (e.g. balls, scarves, bean bags) that allow movement through space.



Training Opportunity

Using Movement for Optimal Development and Early Learning – How Smart Steps Can Make Big Strides
By Gill Connell, Wendy Pirie and Cheryl McCarthy

This is a free online recorded Early Childhood Investigation Webinar. It discusses everyday movement activities for early learning environments as well as strategies to build children's confidence.

A certificate of completion is available after watching this 1.5-hour webinar.

<https://www.earlychildhoodwebinars.com/webinars/using-movement-optimal-development-early-learning-smart-steps-can-make-big-strides-gill-connell-cheryl-mccarthy/>

Featured Activity

Brain Break Movement Dice



What you need:

- 2 clean half-gallon juice or milk cartons
- Scissors (for adult use only)
- Ruler
- Markers
- Construction paper
- Glue or tape

What to Do:

1. Make the dice by measuring 4 inches from the bottom of each carton on all four sides. Draw a line and cut off the top portion.
2. Slide one carton (open side) into the other carton to form a cube.
3. Glue or tape construction paper on all sides of the cube.
4. Use the markers to help your child draw or write different movement activities (e.g. balance on one foot, hop like a frog, or march in a parade).
5. Take turns rolling the dice to decide what movement activity you will do together. Doing a quick movement activity as a brain break can help your child focus, listen and engage in a learning activity.

Suggested Books

Discover these books and more at the Hawai'i State Public Library www.librarieshawaii.org

Move

by Elizabeth Verdick
and Marjorie Lisovskis

This book features engaging photographs of babies and toddlers in action as well as movement tips for parents and caregivers.



Shake A Leg!

by Constance Allen

This story has fun motions for a child to follow along as the Sesame Street characters demonstrate them.



Move! Learn How Different Animals Move

by Steve Jenkins

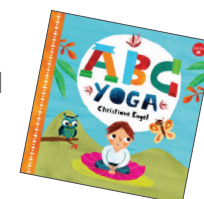
This book playfully introduces the unusual ways that animals move and invites young children to follow them as they swing, leap and slide.



ABC Yoga

by Christine Engel

This board book features colorful illustrations and playful rhymes to teach children simplified yoga poses paired with alphabetized animals and objects.



Citations

Connell, G. and McCarthy, C. (2014). *A Moving Child is a Learning Child: How the Body Teaches the Brain to Think*. Free Spirit Publishing: Minnesota.

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