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The Importance of Movement in Kids' Development

It is important that all young children are physically active every day. In fact, physical activity may play a bigger role in a child's development than previously believed. Recent research suggests that promoting movement and activity in young children can help increase memory, perception, language, attention, emotion and even decision making. When language is combined with movement, learning increases 90 percent. Movement has also been shown to help calm and promote alertness in infants.

Helping young children develop basic movement skills will not only help to increase their school readiness and school success later in life, it will also help them build a foundation for a healthy and active lifestyle as they grow. Here are a few ways that you can promote movement and enhance your child's development:

0-6 months:

- Gently "cycle" her arms and legs
- Let him kick at your hands or a toy
- Dance with her
- Gently rock or swing him
- Play peek-a-boo, moving his hands to cover his eyes

- more -

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- Let her play with spoons, a rubber ring, a soft doll or small rattles that she can grasp
- Lay him on his tummy for "tummy-time"
- Play with him on the floor

6-12 months:

- Dance with him
- Let her explore by climbing or crawling (make sure she is supervised)
- Let him play with pop-up toys to help his hand-eye coordination
- Place a toy just out of reach to encourage her to move towards it
- Give him toys in the bath so he can practice pouring or squirting
- Stand her on the bed and gently bounce her
- Let him play with toys he can stack or simple puzzles
- Help her walk around without a walker

12-18 months:

- Take walks with him and talk about the things that you see
- Have her play with many different toys, such as shopping carts, doll strollers, small wagons and riding toys that can be pushed with her feet
- Let him play with toys that help him practice filling, dumping or stacking
- Allow her to play on safe, low places to practice climbing under, over, inside of, on top of and around
- Allow him to practice his new skills in many different places, such as inside, outside or at other houses
- Praise him for his new skills that he has learned

18-24 months:

- Allow her to play inside and outside with lots of room to crawl, walk, run and jump
- Allow him to play inside in a soft play area with lots of pillows, mats and mattresses
- Let her use large blocks, boxes and blankets for building forts
- Create a safe obstacle course for him to play on
- Allow her to play with crayons, paper, dolls and doll clothes, play dough, snap together blocks, small blocks and small toy figures that help her grasp
- Allow him to grasp, hold, pour, scoop and squeeze different safe materials, such as sand boxes, water basins and play dough
- Allow her to feed herself with utensils and hold her own drink
- Draw and write with him; let him watch you and help him
- Allow her to turn pages of the books you read together

24-36 months:

- Help him discover his shadow on a sunny day; try and catch it
- Help her practice kicking by allowing her to kick a ball
- Play follow the leader with him; let him be the leader
- Dance to music with her
- Spend time outside with him playing on playgrounds or with other children
- Help her build forts for play inside
- Allow him to do simple crafts, such as coloring, cut and paste or string beads
- Allow her to start dressing and feeding herself

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- Allow him to help with simple chores, such as setting the table

By helping your child learn to move, you will not only help with their development, but you will also make sure that they are staying healthy and active. Developing movement skills early on can help promote a healthy lifestyle, learning and overall well-being.

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