



Pathways to Success

Helpful Strategies for Parents and Caregivers of Young Children

Physical Literacy: Risky and Energetic Active Play

Spinning, hanging, balancing on the edge, running, climbing, and jumping – these are the spirited movements of childhood. While this type of play may look chaotic to adults, it is very important for a child's overall development. Thrilling and exciting play that involves an age appropriate physical risk helps children to develop their sense of body awareness and ability to manage their environment, boundaries, and assess future risks. "Risky Play" may look like high climbing on equipment or in nature, running/sprinting, spinning in circles, dancing with the whole body, or boisterous and nonsense words and sounds. Risky play provides positive stress to children- it forms brain connections and helps to build resiliency.

What do children gain from risky and energetic play?

Children are learning a lot of skills by engaging in risky play. They are increasing their physical activity, building better social skills, gaining self-confidence, and learning important lessons about their limits.

Sometimes, this type of play makes adults feel nervous. It is important to remember it is not up to the adults to decide what risky play looks like. Each individual child needs the opportunity to decide for themselves what their limits will be. While children will always require close supervision, most children are able to find their own physical limits than we give them credit for. When given space, even young children show clear abilities to manage risks and figure out their own limits.

Why is risky play important?

- It helps children learn how to lose and regain control of emotions and movement
- It provides the body the opportunity to express a burst of energy
- It allows children to test their own boundaries
- It provides opportunities to experience joy with others



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What is our role as an adult?

Our main role as caregivers is to help children to feel Motivated, Competent, and Confident with their physical abilities! We can do this by:

- Give children opportunities to explore new environments and activities
- Give children the freedom to engage in unstructured play
- Support children to manage realistic dangers that pose a threat to their safety
- Offer plenty of opportunities for physical activity
- Engage with children through modelling, active participation, and encouragement
- Step back and getting out of the way! When a challenge arises, we can count to 20 before stepping in. This provides children a chance to manage the situation for themselves (for example, a child who has climbed up to the top a structure and is trying to figure out how to get down)

Limited Space? No Problem!

Encouraging children to engage in unstructured physical and risky activities can be done indoors or outside and does not require a lot of space. Think of how you can change an activity to suit a smaller space- for example, using a soft squishy ball to throw or kick inside, or having children take turns going through an obstacle course.

Encouraging Risky and Active Play Using Loose Parts

Loose parts can be a wide range of materials that can help spark unstructured play and exploration. Try including some of the following materials in your indoor and outdoor play spaces to stimulate children's curiosity.

Toddlers love to make noise, fill and dump containers, collect and carry objects and climb!

- Provide baskets and different textured and sized objects that can be collected (pine cones, bracelets, large beads, stones)
- Set out paper towel tubes or containers that they can make sounds through
- Stack up sturdy or soft objects like cushions for children to climb on or over
- Set out sticks or Styrofoam noodles children can bang together
- Blow bubbles for chasing and popping
- Fun coloured scarves or material are great for waving in the air when you run and twirl
- Create a tunnel out of cushions, blankets or classroom chairs

Preschoolers love to explore, create, stack, run, climb and get dirty!

- Provide a variety of natural and manufactured materials that children can use in a variety of ways. Pine cones, shells, stones, large sticks, sports equipment, and fabric
- Set out water and sand
- Provide different sized containers for stacking and building
- Allow children to climb, balance and jump from sturdy objects such as tires, milk crates, rocks, and stumps
- Scatter hoola hoops, ribbons and skipping ropes
- Provide golf tees, foam and a tool for hammering to encourage building
- Create space for children to move their body
- Set up cardboard boxes for children to crawl through



References:

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- Ellen, Beate, Hansen, Sandster, (2002). *Children's Expressions of Exhilaration and Fear in Risky Play*.
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