

Micro Soccer Academy at Riverfront Sports

Children move to be happy, to express themselves, to develop their bodies, their intellects, and their motor skills."

Through movement, children learn about themselves and their environment. Movement also improves children's coordination and health. Movement that improves gross motor skills is a crucial part of every young child's developmental process.

Why Do Children Need to Move?

Growth. Research and experience suggest that movement helps children grow intellectually, emotionally, and physically and has an impact on their future health.

Nerve cell networks. Throughout our lives, physical movement is essential because it creates nerve cell networks that are necessary for learning.

Academic success. Children who spend extra time in daily physical activity show a higher level of academic success than children who engage in less regular physical activity.

Self-concept. Arguably the greatest contribution of physical activity, movement improves a child's self-concept. Children's bones and muscles, balance, agility, reaction time, and overall coordination are all improved with movement.

Research indicates that the most significant problem facing children today is obesity. Unless recent trends change, experts predict that the current generation of children in America will be the first to live shorter lives than their parents (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 2000). According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the percentage of children ages 6-19 who are overweight has doubled since 1980. Childhood obesity often translates into serious health concerns like heart disease; colon, stomach, and breast cancer; hypertension; type 2 diabetes; and osteoarthritis. The CDC cites various benefits of regular physical activity including weight control; building and maintaining bones, muscles, and joints; and promoting psychological well-being. Two of the most important aspects of dealing with childhood obesity are daily activity and healthy eating habits.



How Do Children Learn to Move?

Children need many movement opportunities during their first years, a vital period of motor development. "The critical time for the development of motor skills is between eighteen and sixty months of age" (Rosalind Charlesworth, *Understanding Child Development*, 1992).

Children need instruction to become skillful movers. Many preschoolers, when left on their own, will tend toward sedentary activities like watching television and playing computer games. Research suggests that a slight increase in physical activity may significantly improve coordination and endurance. Preschool children respond to their environment. On a playground without adult interaction, children will participate in familiar actions rather than experiencing the variety and depth of movement that intentional learning activities could provide.

Meaningful movement programs are essential for children to learn movement skills in an interesting, organized manner. These programs include all children, and they focus on children *learning* movement skills rather than just keeping them happy and good. Preschoolers learn best through exploration and experimentation, so they should be taught with a child-centered approach. In this type of approach, the teacher facilitates growth by providing environments designed for learning. Children decide what part of a particular learning environment they want to explore. It is crucial that children feel emotionally safe and successful in their quest to learn coordinated movement. An atmosphere of safety is created through age-appropriate, varied group activities. Designing games with the concept of equalization, allowing players to participate at their own levels, contributes to a comfortable and secure learning environment. A prepared teacher who is loving, enthusiastic, and positive is an essential ingredient to each child's growth.

In his book, *Active Start for Healthy Kids*, Dr. Steven Virgilio, an expert on children's health for more than 25 years, presents his philosophy of physical activity for young children. His philosophy, focusing on creating positive health habits in young children, is based on five principles.

- 1** Children should be taught the health benefits of physical activity and proper eating habits.
- 2** Physical activity is for everyone.
- 3** Physical activity should be reinforced through a child's innate desire to move.
- 4** Good health habits should be fun.
- 5** Children should be taught in a manner that is appropriate for children.

Children at Play

When children play games, they are feeling, thinking, and moving all at the same time. They are making numerous decisions:

- Whether they like themselves and if others like them
- Whether they like others
- Whether they like moving
- Whether they can do movement and if they will try new movements
- Whether they are willing to share and cooperate
- Whether they enjoy play

Purposeful play helps children develop in the affective, cognitive, and motor domains. Feelings and attitudes that children have while they move are part of the affective domain, which refers to emotions. Movement programs should strengthen the way children feel about themselves, develop children's social skills, and develop enjoyable and purposeful play. Children develop in the cognitive domain, referring to knowledge and perception, when they learn how to communicate, follow rules and directions, recognize shapes and colors, and move parts of their bodies. The motor domain refers to movement, and children develop in it when specific movement skills are improved.





Goals in the Affective Domain

Working together
Expressing ideas and emotions
Listening to others
Helping others and accepting help
Creating rules
Negotiating and cooperating

Goals in the Cognitive Domain

Planning strategies
Evaluating plans
Generating alternative solutions

Goals in the Motor Domain

Maintaining aerobic fitness, flexibility, muscular strength and endurance
Improving hand-eye-foot coordination
Manipulating objects

Within the motor domain, there are two categories of a child's development: fundamental movement skills and health-related physical fitness. The fundamental movement skills are classified into three groups:

- **Locomotor skills** are large-muscle activities that involve changes in direction of the whole body like walking, hopping, skipping, jumping, sliding, leaping, and chasing.
- **Nonlocomotor skills** are movements with a stationary base like bending, twisting, pushing, pulling, stretching, rolling, and balancing
- **Manipulative skills** involve the control of one or more objects with the hands or feet. These skills include catching, throwing, kicking, volleying, and trapping.

Health-related physical fitness is divided into four categories:

- **Cardiorespiratory endurance** is the capacity of the circulatory system and lungs to provide nutrients and oxygen to the tissues and to remove waste products, providing energy necessary for endurance activities. These activities include running, biking, swimming, and skating.
- **Muscular strength** is the ability of a muscle or muscle group to exert force against resistance in activities such as climbing, lifting objects, pulling, or pushing.
- **Flexibility** is the ability to move joints through a full range of motion.
- **Body composition** is the ratio of body fat to lean body tissue (muscle, bone, internal organs), which should be regulated through exercise and nutrition to avoid obesity.

TEAM: Together Everyone Achieves More

In order for children to develop healthy habits, the home, school, and community must work together to promote proper nutrition and exercise. The family is the predominant influence on a child's health and physical activity habits, so parents should make active play and healthy eating a way of life. Any out-of-home activity program should fully inform and involve parents through newsletters, seminars, and progress reports. Parents should participate as aides, volunteers, or monitors if possible. Schools and the community should collaborate with parents to develop healthy lifestyles in children.

Riverfront Sports seeks to be an organization that partners with parents by providing intentional movement programs that promote active learning in children. **Micro Soccer Academy** focuses on motor skill development, teamwork, and basic soccer skills for children 2-6 years of age. Riverfront Soccer Academy picks up at age 7 to provide more targeted soccer training, introducing competition and tactics.



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