

BACK TO BASICS

Physical development

All children need a safe, healthy environment for investigation and discovery, nutritious meals for physical growth and strength, and attentive adults for support and guidance. Consider these ideas and activities, adjusting the age ranges according to the specific needs of the children in your care.

Infants

- Provide flat woven rugs that pad the floor but allow rolling, reaching, and kicking.
- Place objects just out of an infant's reach to encourage reaching and grasping.
- Avoid placing infants in chairs and swings for long periods—they need unrestrained space to wiggle and squirm.
- Encourage self-feeding with appropriate finger foods.
- Provide low, sturdy furnishings that can be used for pulling up and balancing.
- Include a variety of textures in toys and surfaces.



Toddlers

- Offer opportunities for safe crawling, walking, and climbing.
- Pretend to be crawly animals—snakes, turtles, bears, or cats—and move around the floor.
- Provide textured surfaces to vary walking experiences.
- Put a large cardboard box on the floor to move over, into, through, and around.
- Play walking games—stomp, tiptoe, quick steps, and slow steps.
- Offer a ramp attached to a low step to encourage balanced walks and a short jump at the end.

Preschoolers

- Provide opportunities for safe climbing—slide ladders, jungle gyms, cargo nets, or A-frames.
- Explore games that involve hopping, jumping, sliding, and running.
- Place a ladder on the floor and practice walking between and on the rungs.
- Use large hollow blocks as stepping stones leading to the playground door.
- Jump over puddles after a rain shower.
- Toss beanbags and balls.
- Practice self-help skills like buttoning small buttons, fitting zipper parts together, tying shoes, and turning faucets.

School-agers

- Play games that encourage balance—stand on one foot, stand on one foot with eyes closed, change feet with eyes closed.
- Offer safe opportunities for large muscle use—climbing trees, jumping rope, running on hills, rolling tires, or flying kites.
- Practice walking on balance beams, logs, pipes, the edge of a wall, or a curb.
- Encourage muscle control by tossing balls or beanbags through hoops or at a target and batting or kicking a ball.
- Offer tools that develop small muscles—scissors, pencils, crayons, egg beaters, tweezers, weaving looms, and sewing needles.

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This is the fifth of several pages of development information. Look for each one, printed on cardstock for durability, in our upcoming newsletters; we encourage you to collect each one for your files.

Physical Motor Activities

Colorful Hokey-Pokey:

Provide children with five or six colored dot stickers (each dot should be a different color). Children then put each sticker on a different part of their body (arm, head, knee, etc.) It's best if the children can see each of their own dots so that they can look for the right color if they don't remember where they put each sticker. Sing the "Hokey-Pokey" song together, but instead of singing "put your right arm in," sing "put your red dot in, put your red dot out, etc." As a result, each child is putting in a different part of their body. Continue the song until each color of dot has been named.



Bubbling Over:

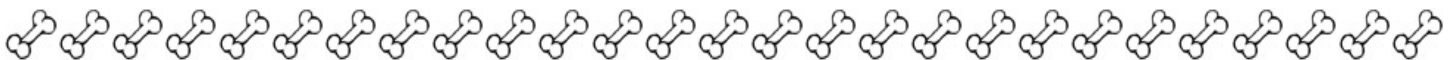
Divide children into groups of two or three. "Bubbles" are formed when each group of players hold hands in a circle. When all the bubbles are ready to take off, they float around the room carefully, trying not to bump into any other bubbles. (Try adding some light music to encourage children to float like bubbles.) Bubbles can spin and twirl gracefully until they inevitably collide with another bubble. Both bubbles pop and then merge into a bigger bubble (all of the children from both bubbles join hands). As more and more bubbles pop, the large group bubble continues to grow. At the end, the big bubble sadly faces the fate of all bubbles and collapses with a pop on the floor.

Variation: Try this game with eyes closed. From "Incredible Indoor Games," Bob Gregson.



A Bone to Pick:

Children remain seated except for one person selected to be the Dog. The Dog sits with eyes closed, facing away from the group. A "bone" – eraser, beanbag, or other object – is placed behind the Dog and in front of the group. Select one player at a time to try to sneak up quietly behind the Dog and get the bone. If the Dog hears a sound, he or she barks like a dog and the would-be bone thief returns to his or her seat. If a player is able to take the bone without being heard, the player returns to his or her seat and hides it. The rest of the group then chants "Dog, Dog, where's your bone?" The Dog then turns around and has three chances to guess who has the bone. If the Dog guesses incorrectly, the group says "No!" If the guess is correct, the group applauds. In both cases, the one who stole the bone becomes the next Dog. From "Incredible Indoor Games," Bob Gregson.



Row, Row, Row Your Boat:

Pair Children up in groups of two. Have them sit on the floor facing each other. Have children put the bottoms of their feet against each other and hold hands. As you sing the song, "Row, Row, Row Your Boat," instruct the children to rock forward and backward by pushing and pulling on each other's hands. Try different movement variations such as "Rock, Rock, Rock Your Boat" (children rock from side to side). From "Sensory Motor Activities for the Young Child," Donna Staiunus Hurley.



The Bumpy Roll:

Gather a variety of soft items such as pillows and stuffed animals. Lay them out on the floor and cover them with a blanket. Have one child at a time lie down along the edge of the blanket and log-roll across the blanket to the other side. Talk about how the blanket felt: smooth, bumpy, hard, soft. See if they can identify the different objects by feeling them with their body. Variations: Use different textured blankets (cotton, nylon, fleece) for the child to roll on. Have the child walk across the blanket with bare feet or crawl on hands and knees. From "Sensory Motor Activities for the Young Child," Donna S. Hurley.