Twisting, Turning, Tumbling, and Twirling

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During cold weather, it is so easy for children to have limited time and space to be physically active. You may see what seems like an increased level of activity, but it is probably that the children have less outside time to work that energy out. Sure, physical activity helps children use up energy and can be fun, but that is not the only reason it is important.

Being physically active helps children build stronger and leaner bodies; reduces the chances of diseases like Type II diabetes, high blood pressure, and heart problems; controls weight; encourages sleep and rest; and improves attitudes. Physical development includes changes in the brain, gross motor (large muscles) skills, fine motor (small muscles) skills, and health. So bundle up, find a large indoor space, or move the furniture, but keep children moving all year long.

The National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE) established national physical education guidelines for infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and children aged five to twelve. NASPE’s position statement notes that children birth to five years should be engaging in daily physical activity that promotes health related fitness and movement skills. Creating activities for young children to twist, turn, twirl, run, jump, hop, stretch, skip, balance, dance, and more helps them build gross motor skills. Activities that encourage children to draw, paint, write, tie shoes, lace boots, work puzzles, participate in finger plays, and more help them build fine motor skills.

To engage young children in physical activity for their large muscles, you do not need to have extensive lesson plans or complicated games but you do need to have adequate and safe space and you need to make time for physical activities and movement. Here are a few very simple ideas to try:

- Use the room as an obstacle course and go under tables and around chairs and against the wall.
- Use floor space to slither from place to place and back again.
- Place tape (or string) on the floor and encourage children to walk on it forward and backward; hop along it; tip toe on it; and jump over it.
- Play music and encourage dancing, clapping, and singing.
- Provide a box of scarves, flags, ribbons, feather boas, and other props children can wave and use to create dances.
- Play Follow the Leader and include many movements that encourage exercise (bend, stretch, hop, roll, run, etc.).
 Invite everyone to do jumping jacks (or any other fun exercise) with you.
 Encourage children to move like animals (elephants, rabbits, snakes, etc.) or objects (toasters, rocking chairs, spinning tops, etc.). They will learn new words and new movements.
 Play parachute games. No parachute? Try a bed sheet for similar effects.
 Use plastic soft drink bottles and a soft ball for bowling, or use beanbags to toss into various boxes or baskets.

Older children may enjoy group games that have more structure. Sometimes the traditional ones may be more fun with a creative twist. Zoom Games by PBS Kids (see web page below) describes “Musical Clothes,” built on “Musical Chairs.” A bag of clothes gets passed while music plays; when the music stops, the bag holder puts on a piece of clothing from the bag. Children can help create new games from old ones, giving them a chance to be physically active, work as a team, and build their intellectual skills by designing a game.

Including materials like books, puzzles, and movies of individuals being physically active provides models and encouragement for children to move. Reviewing the daily schedule to ensure that time for children to be physically active is included contributes to their health. Adults too often say things like, “Be still, sit down, and stop that, instead of saying “Run, Jump, Twist, Turn, and Twirl.” Start finding time, space, and attitude to help children be more active.

Resources

Growing, Growing Strong: A Whole Health Curriculum for Young Children  
(Free Partial Sample Chapter Online) at http://www.redleafpress.org/productdetails.cfm?PC=874
Kids Health for Parents  
http://kidshealth.org/parent/nutrition_fit/fitness/exercise.html
National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE)  
http://www.aahperd.org/naspe/template.cfm?template=ns_index.html
PBS – Physical Development Milestones  
http://www.pbs.org/wholechild/abc/physical.html
Teaching Kids Fine Motor Skills – Videos  
http://www.ehow.com/video_4403195_teaching-kidsfine-motor-skills.html
University of Pittsburg - Motor Development: How Your Child’s Physical Skills Develop  
http://www.education.pitt.edu/ocd/publications/parentingguides/MotorDevelopment.pdf
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration - Move Your Body: Physical Activities for Children  
http://bblocks.samhsa.gov/Family/Activities/Family_Activities/physicalactivities.aspx
Zoom Games  
http://pbskids.org/zoom/activities/games/

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