FiT WIC EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

VERMONT FitWIC

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What is Fit WIC?

Fit WIC is a multi-state project, funded under the 1999 WIC Special Projects Grant, with a mission to develop programs to prevent overweight in young children receiving WIC services. The primary goal of the Vermont Fit WIC Program is to help increase the time young children spend playing actively and decrease the time they spend being sedentary.

The Fit WIC Educator's Guide is a resource for educators of families with young children, including WIC, Head Start, childcare, preschool and playgroup providers. It provides physical activity lesson plan ideas for preschoolers and their families. By having the parent or other caregiver, as well as the child, participate in the lesson, we hope to encourage continued participation in the activities at home.
Play everyday!

Fit WIC concepts

The Vermont Fit WIC Program is based on these concepts:

★

Children learn by doing, and young children use movement to explore many aspects of their environment. Physical activity is an essential component of a child's overall development. Learning physical skills is as important as learning colors, numbers and letters. In fact, when children are physically active they are using their brains as much as their muscles!

★

Although young children can learn some fundamental physical skills on their own, they also need adult help to further develop and expand their motor competence. Children need guidance to master movement skills, just as they do to refine other cognitive skills.

★

Parents are their child's first and most important teachers. All parents can teach their children physical skills, thus giving them the direction and encouragement they need to feel successful and self-confident. Parents who serve as role models for physical activity and who are involved in their child's play also contribute greatly to their child's successful overall development. As educators, you are equally important teachers and role models of physical activity for young children.

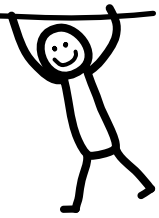
★

Outdoor playtime is more likely to produce vigorous physical activity in young children than indoor playtime.

★

Children benefit from being physically active everyday. Regular physical activity improves mood and overall health and prevents overweight and related diseases. Play everyday!

Developmentally Appropriate Physical Activity for Preschoolers



The activities in this guide are designed for children 3 to 5 years old. Young children need to participate in age-appropriate skill building activities to help them develop physical, as well as social, emotional and cognitive skills. Children learn best when they can integrate all of these aspects of development.

★ Basic motor skills such as throwing, catching, kicking, balancing, etc. should be taught to young children using age and developmentally appropriate methods. The fundamental skills learned during the toddler and preschool years are essential building blocks for adding the more complex motor skills that are required during the school years and on into adulthood. These are skills that children will use throughout their lives. Active children may be more likely to grow into active adults.

★ Preschool movement activities involve the large muscle groups and focus on gross motor practice much more than the small muscle, fine motor activities that are appropriate for older children.

★ Young children are naturally active and enjoy exploring their environment when given the opportunity. They are interested in playing with others, but may not always be able to share or wait their turn. It is best if each child can have his/her own equipment, allowing all children in a group to play simultaneously and continuously. The emphasis should be on cooperation, not competition.

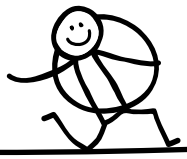
★ Sometimes it's good to let children run with their imaginations, while at other times it's good to direct their play. Young children like and need guidance.

★ The National Alliance for Sports and Physical Education (NASPE) has recently published specific physical activity guidelines for children birth to age 5. It is recommended that preschoolers (ages 3 to 5) accumulate 60 minutes or more of structured, or adult-directed, active play, and 60 minutes or more of unstructured, or child-directed, active play each day. For more information about NASPE, refer to the Readings and Resources section of this guide.

★ Children tend to have short bursts of vigorous activity, followed by recovery periods, throughout the day. Children ages 3 to 5 should not be sedentary for more than 60 minutes at a time except while sleeping.

★ Each preschool child's physical, social and cognitive abilities will be different. It's important to encourage and praise each child's efforts to master

the fundamental motor skills. Children need to be challenged with physical activity, but at the same time need to feel successful in their efforts about 70% to 80% of the time. If you notice a child becoming frustrated or bored with an activity, try modifying the skill they are working on so that it is a little easier or a little more challenging for that child. Fit WIC activities can also be modified to meet the special needs of children with disabilities.



Leading WICtivities

The Fit WIC Educator's Guide was developed to provide physical activity enrichment experiences for preschool children and their parents in a group setting. The guide provides ideas for lesson plans (WICtivities), reproducible parent hand-outs for each lesson and a resource section for further professional learning opportunities.

You will want to plan your WICtivities based on the time and space available, the number of participants and the characteristics of the group. The WICtivities are designed to include parents and children participating and learning together, but in some settings this may not always be possible. If parents are unable to participate in the lesson with their child, be sure to provide them with the parent hand-outs so that the activities can be repeated at home.

It's important to remember that young children have short attention spans, are active in short bursts, and often are not ready to share equipment and wait for a turn. Children should have enough time to complete each activity, but minimal "extra" time. It's very helpful if each child can be doing something continuously during the active parts of the lessons. Allowing 5 to 10 minutes for each activity within a lesson should be sufficient to meet these goals.

WIC TIPS

★ You may want to offer these activities as a WIC nutrition education contact. Try using them in a pre-established group environment, such as a local playgroup or other similar gathering that WIC participants already attend. To keep track of attendance for second nutrition education credit, record participation by having participants sign in as they arrive. Also have participants fill out a name tag (and wear yours too!) so you can call one another by name.

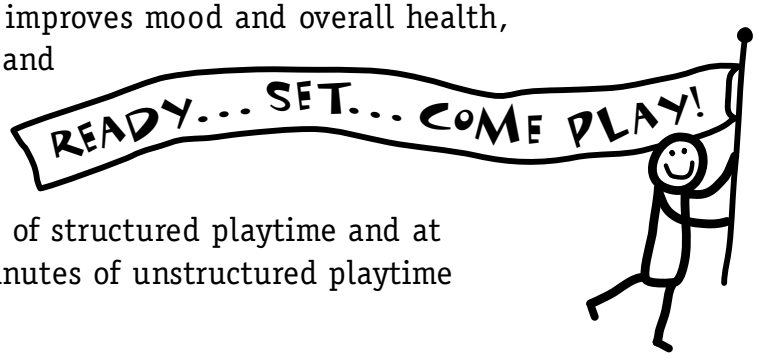
★ In closing, remind parents of the date and topic of the next WIC nutrition class.

Some of the lesson plans lend themselves very well to setting up "activity stations" and dividing your participants among the stations. Set up each station ahead of time with the necessary materials, and hang the instructions for doing the activity. You can use the reproducible parent hand-outs to make instructional posters. A drinking water station would also be appreciated!

The children attending your WICtivity will come with a variety of skill levels. Remind parents of this, and ask them to avoid comparing their child's abilities to someone else's. Encourage parents to modify physical activities to fit their child's skill level so that each child can feel successful.

As you are doing each activity, be sure to include some of the following talking points from the Fit WIC concepts:

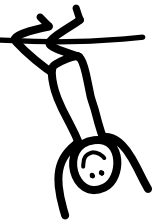
- Children learn by moving.
- Learning physical play skills is as important as learning colors, numbers, letters etc.
- When children exercise, they use their brains as much as their muscles.
- Children can learn some physical play skills on their own: others need to be taught to them.
- Parents are ideal teachers.
- Regular physical activity improves mood and overall health, and prevents overweight and related diseases and may improve sleep habits.
- Preschool-aged children need 60 minutes or more of structured playtime and at least an additional 60 minutes of unstructured playtime each day.



Structured active playtime is not only an ideal time for children to learn physical skills, it's also a great opportunity for them to learn new vocabulary and other concepts related to movement. As you engage in active play during WICtivities, introduce your participants to action words like throw, toss, bounce, dribble, step, hop, jump, balance, dance and twirl. In addition to the action words, talk about the movement concepts of directionality (up, down, forward, backward, sideways, straight) and intensity (hard, soft, fast, slow, light, heavy, loud, quiet).

To close a WICtivity, offer a drink of water and a light healthy snack if desired. Provide positive feedback to parents regarding their child's abilities, and praise the children, too. Be sure to give parents the accompanying hand-outs for each lesson and remind them to help their child practice physical skills daily (if parents haven't attended, send the hand-outs home with the child). Thank everyone for participating and doing well.

Aim for Success



Objectives:

For parents and other caregivers to:

- Understand the importance of active play in the child's overall development
- Recognize each individual child's skill level
- Adjust skill-building games to meet the child's individual skill level
- Maintain an appropriate level of challenge for each child throughout the lesson

We know that in order for young children to enjoy doing an activity they need to succeed at it 70% to 80% of the time; any less and they get frustrated and quit, any more and they get bored quickly and can become distracted.

Parents and other caregivers can learn to recognize each child's level of skill and adjust skill-building activities accordingly. If a child is not challenged enough by a certain activity, the difficulty can be increased to match the child's ability. Conversely, if the activity is too advanced, it can be made easier.

These activities will help parents and other caregivers recognize the differences in children's skill levels, and adapt activities accordingly.

HELPFUL HINTS

★ Set up a station for each of the three following activities. Divide the participants into three groups and direct each group to a station. Have the children practice each skill with their parents' help as you circulate from station to station.

★ Have children rotate to the next activity station when each child in the group has had a chance to practice each skill. About 8 to 10 minutes at each station would be appropriate for these types of activities.

★ The activities should come to a close when parents have had a chance to observe and help their child at each station.

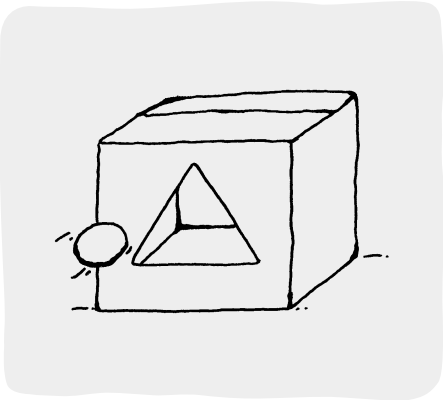
Parent Hand-outs:

Bean Bag Target Toss
Toss & Catch
Foot Dribble
WICtivity: Aim for Success

Bean Bag Target Toss

Equipment:

Bean bags (about 3 for each child doing this activity at any one time), targets, roll of masking tape



Set up:

Set up bean bag target(s). For the targets you can cut various sized holes into a large cardboard box; use masking tape to mark target squares of various sizes on the floor or a wall; or place various sized containers such as trash cans, baskets and empty boxes around the play area. With masking tape, place several lines on the floor, parallel to the targets, to mark off tossing lines. If you don't have bean bags, you can substitute balls made from crumpled paper or rolled up socks.

What to Do:

Have child try tossing bean bags into the target. Be sure to use the words describing the motions.

Overhand and *underhand*

Slow and *fast*

From *close up* and from *far away*

Modifications for skill level:

Easier:
- Have the child move to a tossing line closer to the target.
- Use a target with larger hole or area.

Harder:
- Have the child move to a tossing line further from the target.
- Use a target with smaller hole or area.

Toss & Catch

Equipment:

Several soft balls of different sizes and textures, such as beach balls, punch balls, foam balls, sock balls, crumpled paper balls; bean bags.

Set up:

Place the balls and bean bags in an area where children (and adults!) can play toss and catch. Plan to have one ball per pair of participants.

What to Do:

Have children try *throwing* one of the larger balls to another participant (parent, caregiver, another child). Be sure to use the vocabulary below in directing the motions.

Overhand, underhand, and as a *bounce*

hard and *soft*

From *close* up and from *far* away

Up *high* and down *low*

Have child try *catching* one of the larger balls when someone else throws it:

Overhand, underhand, and as a *bounce*

hard and *soft*

From *close* up and from *far* away

Up *high* and down *low*

Modifications for skill level:

Easier:
- Have child simply throw the ball up into the air—omit any catching.
- Use larger, softer balls and stand closer together.

Harder:
- Use smaller, firmer balls and move further apart.

Variations:

Let the child try bouncing the ball and catching it herself.

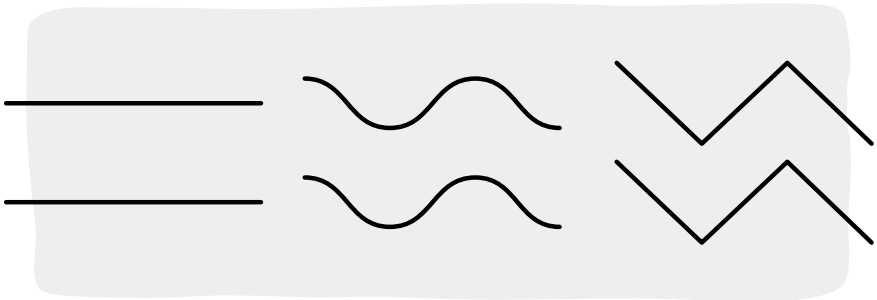
Foot Dribble

Equipment:

Roll of masking tape; beach balls or other large soft balls

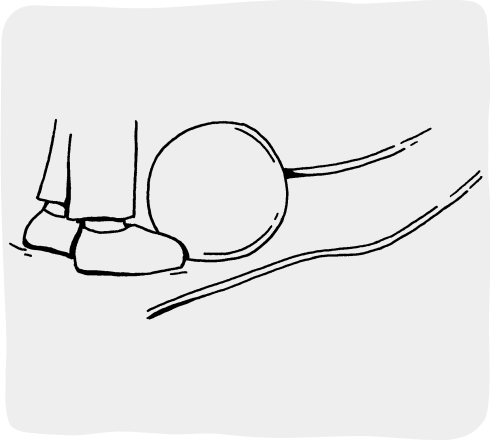
Set up:

Set up three different paths with masking tape: one straight, one curved, and one zig-zagged.



What to Do:

Have the child try dribbling the ball with her feet along the:
1. Straight path
2. Curved path
3. Zig-zagged path



Skill Pointer:

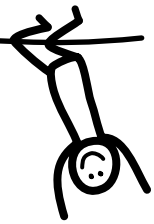
Show the children how to dribble using the inside edge of the foot, rather than the toe, to move and control the ball.

Modifications for skill level:

Easier:
- Omit the paths and have the participants pair up. Ask them to kick the balls very gently back and forth to each other.
- Try using a crumpled paper ball, which won't roll away and will help children maintain control

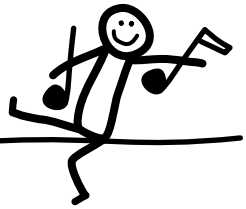
Harder:
- Follow the more difficult zig-zag path using increased speed

WICtivity: Aim for Success



- You are your child's first and most important teacher. You can teach your child many of the physical skills he will need throughout his life.
- Your child will learn new physical skills best if you give her plenty of opportunities to practice them.
- Children feel good about themselves when they are successful but also challenged. You know your child best—watch for signs that an activity is too hard, or isn't challenging enough, and modify the activity to meet your child's specific needs.
- Learning physical skills is as important for your child's healthy development as learning colors, numbers, letters, etc.
- Regular physical activity improves mood and overall health, and prevents overweight and related diseases. It may also help children sleep better.

We've Got Rhythm



Objective:

For parents and other caregivers to:
• Provide a variety of rhythmic experiences so that all children can feel good about moving their bodies to music.

Rhythm and movement come naturally to most children, but occasionally some children are uncomfortable moving to music or a beat. By incorporating a variety of movement activities into your lesson, all children will have a chance to feel good about moving their bodies to music.

Structured rhythmic activities use apparatus such as rhythm sticks, scarves, balls, ribbon wands, etc. to help children explore movement to music. Action songs or traditional dances with specific, choreographed movements also fall into this category.

Creative movement activities are more open-ended and interpretive. Children are encouraged to pretend and use their imaginations. Music or other props can provide children with ideas to move to, and many children's books are wonderful sources of creative movement ideas.

HELPFUL HINTS

This WICtivity includes three types of movement activities. If time, space and audience characteristics allow, it would be best to do all three; but you can certainly tailor the lesson to shorten it if needed. Making the ribbon wands ahead of time will shorten the lesson.

For the musical parts of this lesson, we recommend using *Playtime Favorites*, available as a cassette or CD. We've provided ordering information in the *Readings and Resources* section of the guide.

The goal of this lesson is to help children feel good about moving their bodies. Emphasize to parents that this is much more important than getting the right movement with the right word.

Finish the lesson with the story activity, and at the end of the story, ask everyone to lie down and pretend they're asleep. This will help settle the children and prepare them to leave.

Parent Hand-outs

Movin' to the Groove
Wavy Wands
Ready, Set, Act it Out!
WICtivity: We've Got Rhythm

Movin' To The Groove

Equipment:

CD or cassette tape of active children's music and appropriate player

What to do:

Begin the activities with a movement song such as *Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes* (available on *Playtime Favorites*). Review these body parts with participants, asking the children to show you where each is located. Explain to them that each time they hear one of the body parts in the song, they should touch theirs. You can play (or sing!) the song through once and demonstrate if needed.

Other appropriate movement songs you could use here might be *London Bridge*, *Hokey Pokey*, *Skip to My Lou* or *The Wheels on the Bus*.

Modifications for skill level:

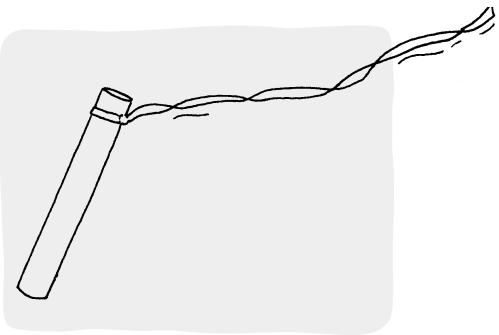
Easier:

- Slower songs with fewer transitions in motions are easier.

Harder:

- Faster songs with more movements take more coordination and skill.

Wavy Wands



Equipment:

CD or cassette tape of active children's music and appropriate player. One ribbon wand for each child and adult. Make by securely tying several 4 foot lengths of multi-colored ribbon to wooden cooking spoons, one foot rulers, paint stirrers or paper towel tubes. If time and group characteristics allow, each participant can make their own wand.

Set up:

Allow plenty of space for everyone to move their ribbon wands freely so no one gets hit and so the ribbons can flow in the air.

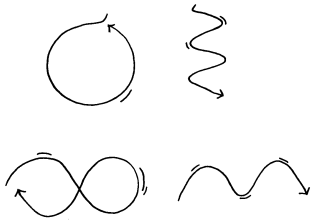
What to do:

Before moving their wands in a pattern to music, let the participants experiment with just moving them for a few minutes. Slowly teach the movements below without music. Give them plenty of time to practice! Next, stand in front of the group and lead them in a sequence of movements.

- Wipers
- Circles
- Floor sweeps
- Fishing
- Zigzag down
- Snakes
- Flags

Lastly, have participants try moving their wands to music as you lead them in a series of movements. *The Wheels on the Bus*, *She'll Be Comin' Round the Mountain*, or *The Ants Go Marching* make good tunes to do this kind of activity to.

Modifications for skill level:



circles, zigzag down, figure 8's, waves

Easier:

- Omit any choreography and let children make up their own sequences of movements.
- Choose shorter songs and demonstrate fewer movements

Harder:

- Choose longer songs with more complex movement sequences.

READY, SET, ACT IT OUT!

Equipment:

Poems or short stories that contain a strong sense of linguistic rhythm or vocabulary suggesting movement and action, and lend themselves to the acting out of situations or characters. Here are a few suggestions:

Barn Dance by Bill Martin, Jr. and John Archambault, illustrated by Ted Rand

Clap Your Hands, story and pictures by Lorinda Bryan Cauley

Down in the Woods at Sleepytime, by Carole Lexa Schaefer; illustrated by Vanessa Cabban

Skip to My Lou, adapted and illustrated by Nadine Bernard Westcott

Stone Soup, story and pictures by Tony Ross

We're Going on a Bear Hunt, by Michael Rosen, illustrated by Helen Oxenbury

White Snow, Bright Snow, by Alvin Tresselt, illustrated by Roger Duvoisin

Set up:

Gather everyone into a circle and tell them you're going to read them a story or poem. They may sit and listen to the story, or they can use their imaginations and act out some of the different words or sentences they hear.

What to do:

As you read through the book, you may want to stop in certain places and give prompts for specific movements suggested in the story. For example if you were reading *Stone Soup* by Tony Ross, you could ask children to hang out the wash, wash the dishes, vacuum the house, dig potatoes, chop wood and more!

Modifications for skill level:

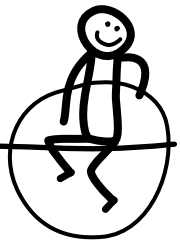
Easier:
- Demonstrate actions if children cannot imagine them.

Harder:
- Ask children to act out some of the more complex vocabulary or situations.

WICtivity: We've Got Rhythm

- You are your child's first and most important teacher. You can teach your child many of the physical skills he will need throughout his life.
- Young children love music and they love to move, but not all children are comfortable with rhythm. By giving them plenty of opportunities to move in time to music, you will be helping them to learn important things about controlling their bodies. Most of all, give them plenty of praise.
- Moving and learning to music also helps children develop good listening and visual skills.
- When children exercise, they use their brains as much as their muscles.
- Regular physical activity improves mood and overall health, and prevents overweight and related diseases. It may also help children sleep better.

I Can Make It Myself



Objectives:

For parents and other caregivers to:

- Understand that play equipment can be made at home from inexpensive materials.
- Help children recognize that they can create their own toys from common household items.

It's easy and inexpensive to make your own active play equipment! It just takes a few simple materials and a little bit of imagination. The purpose of this lesson plan is to show participants that they don't have to spend a lot of money on play equipment to encourage children to be active. Making play equipment can be a fun activity for parents or other caregivers and children to do together.

HELPFUL HINTS

Because this lesson is more complex than the others, you may decide to choose just 2 of the following activities. Set up a station for each activity, divide the participants into groups and direct each group to a station. Have parents and children make each piece of equipment and practice the related skills as you circulate from station to station. Rotate to the next activity when everyone has finished at their station.

The activities should come to a close when parents have had a chance to observe and help their child at the activity at each station. Applaud the children for their efforts!

Parent Hand-outs:

Crumpleball Box Toss
Twirl-A-Hoop
Shake It, Baby
More Active Toys You Can Make at Home
WICtivities: I Can Make It Myself

Crumpleball Box Toss

Equipment:

Newsprint paper; masking tape; medium sized, open cardboard boxes (about 16 inch square, allow one per child); optional—markers, glue sticks, magazine photos, wrapping paper, etc. for decorating boxes

Set up:

For the crumple balls, have newsprint or other paper (at least several sheets per participant) available to make balls from. Set out the boxes (and materials for decorating them if time and audience characteristics allow).

What to do:

Give each child (or child and adult pair) paper for making the balls, an open cardboard box, and materials for decorating the box (if desired). Have participants crumple paper into balls, and fold in the top flaps on the tops of their boxes to make a basket style container. Once the balls and boxes are completed, adults can mark parallel lines on the floor with masking tape at appropriate distances from the cardboard baskets. Have participants toss the balls into the boxes. Instruct them to try:

Underhand, Overhand

Fast, Slow

Hard, Soft

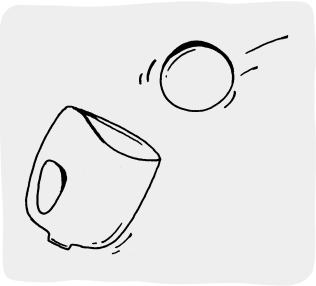
Modifications for skill level:

Easier:

- Have the child move to a tossing line closer to the box.

Harder:

- Have the child move to a tossing line further from the box.



Variations:

Describe or demonstrate other possible games using crumple balls such as milk jug catch: use empty, plastic gallon milk jugs with the bottoms cut off as catching scoops (tape over any rough edges for safety).

TWIRL-A-HOOP

Equipment:

For plastic hoops (allow one set of hoop materials per child): Flexible plastic plumbing pipe (polyethylene tubing is best) 1/2 inch outer diameter, cut into 6 foot lengths; flexible plastic plumbing pipe (polyethylene tubing is best) 3/8 inch outer diameter, cut into 3 inch lengths; duct tape; small stickers (optional)

Set up:

Demonstrate how to make the plastic hoops from the plumbing pipe: Using a 6 foot length of the pipe, connect the two ends by inserting the 3 inch piece into both ends. If it does not fit snugly, you may need to tape the joint.

Give each child or adult/child pair a six foot length and a three inch length of pipe and ask them to make a hoop. Offer stickers to decorate the hoops if desired.

Once everyone has completed their hoops, have participants try the following skills as you discuss some of these movement words and concepts. It's very helpful and fun if you do the skills right along with the participants.

What to do:

Introduce the concept of personal space, suggesting everyone spread out enough that they will not bump into each other.

Be sure to use the vocabulary describing the actions and movement concepts as you progress through the activity.

- Ask each child to lay his hoop on the floor and try to *step*, then *jump*, then *hop* on one foot *into* and *out* of the hoop; try it moving backwards.
- Lay several hoops on the floor in succession and have participants take turns jumping or hopping from one to the other, down the line.
- Have everyone try to *twirl* it *around* one *wrist* or *arm*, then the other.
- Have everyone try to twirl it *around* their *waist*.

Modifications for skill level:

The activities above are in order of increasing difficulty. Stay with the easier ones for children who need more practice mastering the basics. Move quickly onto the harder activities for those who are ready for more challenge.

(continued)

Variations:

- Use the hoop as a bean bag target on the ground or floor
- With the hoop around her waist, have child "drive" around the yard or a room, trying not to bump into anything.
- With a group of children, try to see how many can balance on one foot inside the hoop at one time.
- Try balancing in various positions inside the hoop:
  on all fours squatting;
  on all fours with arms and legs straight, now raise one leg.
  Try standing on one foot with arms and the free leg extended, now lean forward with arms spread and free leg extended back.
- Take the hoop to the park and see how long your child can keep it rolling by pushing it with his hand.

SHAKE IT, BABY!

Equipment:

Empty, small, plastic drink bottles with lids—one per participant; dried beans, peas, corn or rice (about 1/2 cup per participant); masking or duct tape; small stickers for decorating shakers (optional)

Set up:

Set out the materials for making and decorating the shakers on a long table.

What to do:

Have each participant partially fill their bottle with the dried beans etc. Secure the lid with tape. Have participants form a line and march around the room, shaking their maracas:

fast
slow
loudly
quietly
high
low

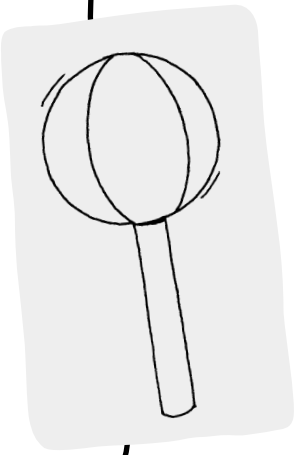
Variations:

Use empty plastic eggs or film containers for shakers, and fill with birdseed or sand.

More active toys you can make at home

Balancing tubes

Use paper towel tubes to carry around a ball balanced on one end. The bigger the ball, the more difficult to balance. You can try running with the tubes or passing the ball from tube to tube.



Jump rope

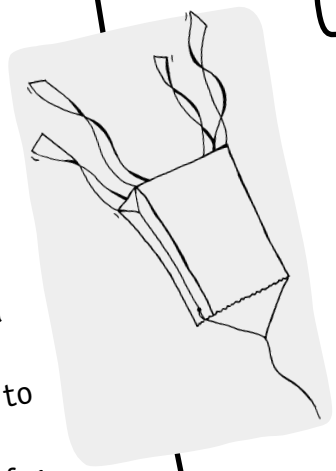
The best length for young children is 7 feet. Heavy weight rope is easiest for them to get over their heads.

Flying disks

Coffee can lids make great tossing toys. Take them outdoors for more active fun.

Kite

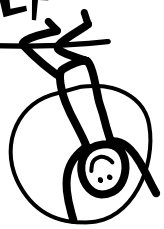
Decorate a paper bag using crayons, markers, stickers, etc. Glue a crepe paper streamer to each bottom corner. Punch a hole in 2 opposite sides of the bag, near the top and tie a short piece of string through them to form a loop. Attach another long string for flying line to the loop. Go outside and fly your kite!



Bean bags

Sew together squares of cloth measuring 5 1/2 by 5 1/2, allowing a 1/4 inch seam and leaving a gap on one seam for filling. Fill with about 1/2 cup rice, dried beans, peas or lentils. Sew up the gap.

WICtivity: I Can Make It Myself



- You are your child's first and most important teacher. You can teach your child many of the physical skills he will need throughout his life.
- Your child will learn new physical skills best if you give her plenty of opportunities to practice them.
- When children exercise, they use their brains as much as their muscles.
- It's easy and inexpensive to make your own active play equipment! It just takes a few simple materials and a little bit of imagination.
- Making and using homemade play equipment can be fun activities for parents and children to do together.
- Regular physical activity improves mood and overall health, and prevents overweight and related diseases. It may also help children sleep better.

A Balancing Act

Objectives:

For parents and other caregivers to:

- Understand the concepts of static and dynamic balance.
- Understand the importance of teaching children balancing skills.
- Help children feel successful doing a variety of balancing activities.

HELPFUL HINTS

Begin the class with a short discussion about the concept of balance. Without it, we'd fall over all of the time! Parents and children may relate to infants who are just learning to walk—consider the number of times they fall down as they lose their balance.

Demonstrate the differences between static and dynamic balance. An example of static balance would be standing in place on one foot. An example of dynamic balance would be walking along a "tight rope" of tape on the floor.

Set up a station for each of the 4 following activities. Provide instructions for the activity at each station. Divide your participants into groups and have the children practice each skill with their parents' help as you circulate from station to station.

Rotate groups to the next activity station when each child in the group has had a chance to practice each skill. Approximately 6 to 8 minutes at each station would be appropriate for most preschool children.

The activities should come to a close when parents have had a chance to observe and help their child at the activity at each station. Applaud the children for their efforts!

Learning balance is an important skill for children. For very young children, balance may simply mean not falling over. There are two types of balancing skills—static and dynamic. Static balance is holding a desired shape while stationary. Dynamic balance is balancing while moving. Dynamic balance is critical to a young child's development of movement skills. Without it children would not be able to move about effectively and safely through their environment.

Balance is an important skill that helps children develop strength, flexibility and body control. Learning to master her own body movements builds a child's self-confidence and self-esteem. Like any other skill, developing good balance takes regular practice.

Young children should first practice balancing on many different body parts (both hands and both feet) and a comfortably wide base of support (like the floor), then progress to balancing on a few body parts (one foot) and a more narrow and challenging base of support (a small square marked out on the floor).

Parent Hand-outs:

Body Shapes
Balance Beam
Stretch Like a Cat, Crouch Like a Lion
WICtivity: A Balancing Act

Body Shapes

Equipment:

Masking tape; large sheets of heavy, colored poster paper cut into shapes such as a circle, square, rectangle, triangle, trapezoid

Set up:

Tape the colored paper shapes securely to the floor with masking tape. Another option would be to simply mark the outline of the shapes on the floor using the masking tape.

What to do:

Ask each child to chose a shape and have the child step inside of the shape. Direct them to try the following activities:

Sit inside their shape on their bottoms and:
- Extend feet out (off the ground)
- Keep feet extended and extend arms out, too (if this is too difficult, try keeping one arm and/or one leg touching the floor)

★

Stand in the middle of their shape and:
- Bend one knee, keeping that foot off the ground
- Extend that leg, keeping the foot off the ground
- Lean forward with leg extending back off the ground (like a bird or plane!)

★

Keeping both arms extended out to the side can help children maintain balance.

★

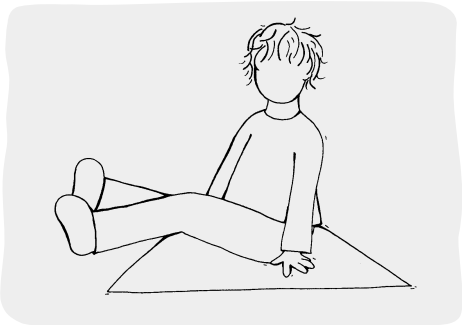
Balance on the outline of their shape:
- *Square or rectangle*: On all fours, with hands and feet on each of the four corners (arms and legs are straight)
- *Triangle:* Place feet on two points of the triangle. Place hands (easiest), elbows, or head (most difficult) on the third point
- *Circle:* Stand in the middle and place hands anywhere on the perimeter

★

(continued)

Once they are balanced on their shapes, ask the children to:

- Raise one leg
- Raise one arm
- Raise one arm and opposite leg at the same time
- Balance on knees and elbows



Ask the children to make up their own ways of balancing on their shapes.

Modifications for Skill Level:

Using a larger shape and balancing on more body parts is easier; balancing on fewer body parts on a smaller shape is more difficult.

Variations:

Try the same types of balancing activities, but replace the shapes with plastic hoops placed flat on the floor (see *I Can Make It Myself* for directions on making hoops).

Balance Beam

Equipment:

Roll of masking tape

Set up:

Create a "balance beam" on the floor for each child at the station. Mark out an area about 6 to 8 feet long and 4 inches wide using masking tape.

What to Do:

Have child jump onto the "balance beam." Point out the value of using outstretched arms for balance.

Have child try walking along the balance beam:

- Forward—walk forward along the beam, one foot in front of the other, heel to toe
- Sideways—walk sideways along the beam, sliding one foot to meet the other as child moves down the beam. Now try walking sideways, one foot crossing over the other (this is more challenging!)
- Backward—walk backward along the beam, placing one foot in back of the other, toe to heel

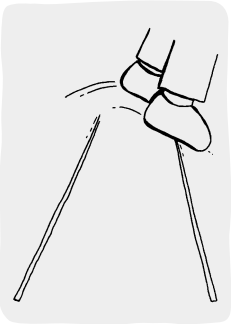
Skill pointer:

Suggest the children step with one foot, stop to regain balance, then step with the other, and extend their arms out to help maintain balance.

Modifications for skill level:

Stand beside child and hold her hand to make it easier.

Use a tight rope—just a single length of tape instead of the balance beam. Change direction while moving along the tight rope to make it harder.



Variations:

Have child try:

- Jumping over the balance beam
- Balancing on one foot on the balance beam
- Hopping on one foot along the balance beam

Stretch Like a Cat, Crouch Like a Lion

Equipment:

Large, open floor-space

What to Do:

Participants should spread out with enough room to lie down. Begin by having the group sit cross legged with hands on their knees. Ask them to take 5 slow deep breaths and focus on relaxation. Then lead participants through a series of animal poses that are adapted from yoga exercises. Suggest that they try the following:

- Sit on a lily pad like a frog
- Perch on a flower like a dragonfly
- Crouch in the jungle like a lion,
- Stretch in the sun like a cat
- Stand in a pond like a flamingo
- Curl in the grass like a snake

The goal is to encourage children to use their imaginations as they stretch and balance, rather than have them copy exactly the leader's movements.

Modifications for skill level:

Easier:
- Suggest that the child balance on several body parts rather than few

Harder:
- Have the child try holding each pose (and maintaining balance) for a minute or longer

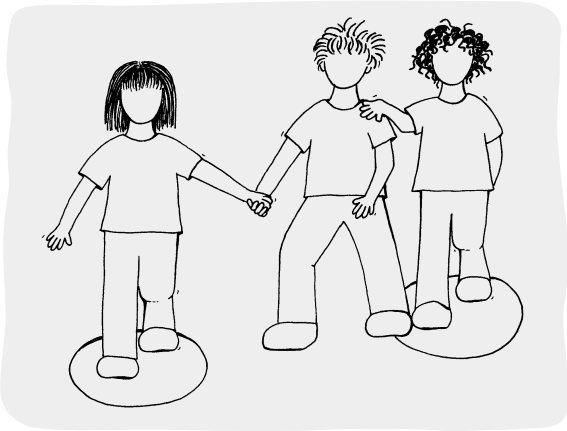
Variations:

Choose a theme such as the farmyard, the zoo, the jungle, the swamp, or the ocean and pose as animals found there.

Connect the Dots

Equipment:

Large, open floor-space space.



What to do (easier):

Have children and adults hold hands and form a large circle. Then ask everyone to drop hands and place their right hand on their neighbor's left shoulder. Lead the group through a series of actions while maintaining individual and group balance. Actions to try include:

- Standing on one foot, first left, then right
- Leaning forward, leaning to the left, leaning to the right, leaning back

Variation (harder):

Tape a series of paper circles across the floor, spread about 2–3 feet apart. Divide group in half. Have one half each pick a circle and stand on it. Ask the other half to try to "connect the dots" by stretching and balancing on different parts of their bodies to reach and connect with the participants who are standing on the dots.

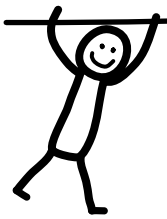
Once everyone is connected, ask the standing group to balance on one foot, while connector group adapts to maintain connections.

See if the whole group can maintain balance while leaning left, right, forward and backwards.

WICtivity: Balancing Act

- Children learn about their world by moving through it.
- Children can learn some physical play skills on their own: others need to be taught to them.
- You are your child's first and most important teacher. You can teach your child many of the physical skills he will need throughout his life.
- Balance is an important skill that helps children develop strength, flexibility and body control.
- Learning to master her own body movements builds a child's self-confidence and self-esteem.
- Regular physical activity improves mood and overall health, and prevents overweight and related diseases. It may also help children sleep better.

Recommended Readings on Young Children & Physical Activity



Active Start: Physical Activity for Children Birth to Five Years. National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE). 2002. 1-800-321-0789. www.aahperd.org/naspe

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Appropriate Practices in Movement Programs for Young Children Ages 3–5. National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE). 2002. 1-800-321-0789. www.aahperd.org/naspe

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Bright Futures in Practice: Physical Activity. Patrick K, Spear B, Holt K, Sofka D, eds. 2001. Arlington, VA: National Center for Education in Maternal and Child Health.

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Designing Preschool Movement Programs. Sanders, Stephen W. 1992. Champaign, Illinois: Human Kinetics Publishers.

★

Movement Activities for Early Childhood. Totsky Hammett, Carol. 1992. Champaign, Illinois. Human Kinetics Books.

Other Resources for Young Children & Physical Activity

For Educators

Growing Up Fit—Together. Reicks, Marla. University of Minnesota Extension Service, University of Minnesota, 162 FScN; Eckles Avenue, St. Paul, MN 55108. mreicks@che2.umn.edu

Moving and Learning Newsletter. Pica, Rae. 346 No. Barnstead Rd., Ctr. Barnstead, NH 03225. 603-776-7411. Raepica@movingandlearning.com

Playouts for Preschoolers Curriculum. Ehlinger, Sally, Early Childhood Physical Activity Specialist, University of Minnesota. 617-827-8087. ehlin006@tc.umn.edu

SPARK Physical Education Curricula. 6363 Alvarado Court, Suite 250, San Diego State University, San Diego, CA 92120. 1-800-SPARKPE. spark@projects.sdsu.edu www.foundation.sdsu.edu/projects/spark

SportFun: Developmentally Appropriate Movement Skill Activities for 3 to 5 year Olds. A collaboration between: Human Kinetics wwwhumankinetcis.com; Sport For All www.sportforall.net; Sportime www.sportime.com; The Youth Sport Trust www.youthsport.net; National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE) www.aahperd.org/naspe

For Parents

Children Growing Healthy. Massachusetts WIC Program, Nutrition Education Task Force. 1998. 1-800-942-1007.

Music

Playtime Favorites music cassette tape or CD. Available from Music for Little People, PO Box 1460, Redway, CA 95560. 1-800-346-4445. musicforlittlepeople@mflp.com

Story books

Berenstain Bears and Too Much TV. Berenstain, Stan and Jan. Random House, New York. 1984. ISBN 0-394-86570-7

The Best Way to Play. Cosby, Bill. Scholastic Inc. New York. 1997. ISBN 0-590-95617-5