

Encourage Active Play and Participate With Children



Nutrition and Wellness Tips for Young Children: Provider Handbook for the Child and Adult Care Food Program

Active play is physical activity. Engaging in active play with children is good role-modeling, and a great way to relieve stress.

Children learn behaviors from adults. Encouraging children to be physically active each day can help them develop a positive attitude toward movement, dance, sports, and other physical activity. Playing actively with children in your care can help them develop healthy habits.



Why is it important to encourage active play?

By moving more and sitting less, children learn to live in a healthful way. When children participate in active play, they develop their large muscles. Large muscle development is important for movements such as walking, balancing, sitting up straight, kicking, jumping, lifting, reaching, and throwing a ball. Large muscle development also supports the development of small muscles, which helps with skills such as holding small objects and turning pages in a book.

Active play also develops children's confidence in their ability to be physically active. You should encourage active play every day because:

- ▶ **Active play** helps children build their bones.
- ▶ **Habits are learned early in life**, so being active while in child care can create lifelong physical activity habits.
- ▶ **Children may spend a lot of time at home in front of televisions** and computers instead of playing actively. Give them good habits while they are in your care!



What should I do to encourage active play?

To promote children's active play, **you** can:

- ▶ **Participate with children** during active play time.
- ▶ **Plan and encourage physical activities** that are appropriate and safe.
- ▶ **Lead activities two or more times per day** that promote children's physical movement.
- ▶ **Encourage movement** by getting children actively moving often.
- ▶ **Wear clothing and footwear that permits easy and safe movement**, and let families know to dress children in appropriate clothing and footwear. (See the *Promote Active Play Through Written Policies and Practices* tip sheet on page 69 for more information.)
- ▶ **Limit "screen time,"** such as TV and DVD viewing, video games, recreational computer use, and other electronic devices. (See the *Limit Screen Time Tip Sheet* on page 73 for more information.)



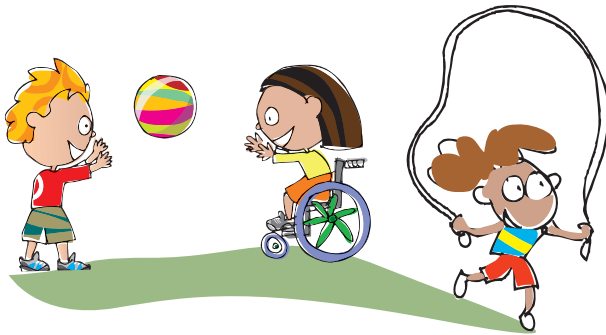
Activities

What are some specific ways I can encourage active play every day in my child care program?

Use every opportunity to show the children that you believe physical activity is important.

Which of these ideas will you try next week? Mark your choices.

- Encourage active play by offering children a variety of options** such as hula hoops, balls, and jump ropes and letting them choose what they want to do.



- Make a chart for tracking physical activity with children’s and child care providers’ names.** Have children place a sticker or a stamp by their name every time they participate in active play. Send ideas home to families so they can continue to encourage active play at home.

- Let families know that physical activity is an important part of the day** when children are in your care. Add physical activity messages to newsletters, posters, and posted schedules. http://www.teamnutrition.usda.gov/resources/Nibbles/Nibbles_Newsletter_36.pdf

- Display posters and pictures of children and adults being physically active.** Read books that promote physical activity as part of the story.

- Request that families dress children in clothing, shoes, and outerwear** that allow movement and play outside, or bring clothes to change into for playing outdoors.

- Make activity cards and use them for a game** by having children select a card and then demonstrate the activity. Activity cards are easy to make – use index cards or square sheets of paper. On one side of the card, paste a picture of a physical activity movement. The child who chooses the card will show everyone else how to do the movement.

- See the *Provide Opportunities for Active Play* tip sheet** on page 63 for instructions and other ideas.

List other ideas to show children that physical activity is fun:

- Include physical activity in your special events and family events.** Lead children and their families in playing *Octopus Tag* or *Musical Hoops*. Add fun by using pool noodles, beach balls, and hula hoops.

- Be a good role model.** Participate with children in activities and show them through your actions that active play is an important and fun part of the day. Make positive comments about physical activity.

