

Building Endurance: Let's Get Physical!



Building endurance (increasing the length of time that one can continue a physical activity) is a central part of physical fitness. Fitness is important for preschool children because health habits begin early and can influence later childhood and adult health. The Illinois Early Learning Standards (Benchmark 20.B.EC) stress the need for teachers to encourage young children to increase endurance by becoming more active.

Young children need to move!

Avoid lesson plans that keep a preschool child inactive for more than an hour at a time. Integrate movement into your lessons. If the children are reading a story about an animal, take time to stretch as tall as a giraffe or walk like an elephant. Make a letter T by holding arms out straight. Count by jumping up and down five times.

Provide time for structured physical activity as well as time for self-directed play.

Plan for at least 30 minutes each day of structured activity that includes stretching, large muscle activities, and time to cool down. Make it fun by including games and dancing. Avoid competitive games that may discourage the overweight or inactive child.

Teach skills and attitudes that encourage healthy, active lives.

Teaching children to stretch, warm-up, and cool-down when exercising helps avoid injury. A child who learns basic movement skills, such as throwing and catching a ball, or jumping with both feet and landing safely, may be more confident in her ability to enjoy sports and games. Be aware of special needs or limitations, and plan to include all your students in movement activities.

Teach fitness for children as an ongoing process.

Emphasize regular vigorous exercise and healthy lifestyles. Encourage children to set and meet their own exercise goals and not compare themselves to others. If Caron tells you that she spends her evenings playing with dolls or watching videos, help her set a goal of jumping rope or dancing for increasing periods of time instead. Follow-up by encouraging her to mark her choices on a chart.

Make an activity pyramid with your class.

Begin with a broad base of exercises that can be done everyday. Add a layer of the kinds of vigorous exercise and active play the children should enjoy several times a week. Top with activities to cut down on, such as watching television and playing computer games. See the following Web site for an activity pyramid you can use with your class: <http://muextension.missouri.edu/xplor/hesguide/foodnut/gh1800.htm>.

Involve parents.

Many adults are interested in improving their own fitness and endurance levels. Encourage parents to walk and play actively with their children. Turning off the television and going for a walk or dancing to recorded music can be fun for everyone in the family.

For related Web resources, see “Building Endurance: Let’s Get Physical!” at <http://illinoisearlylearning.org/tips.htm>.



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