



IMPORTANCE OF MOVEMENT FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

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Abstract:

Research continues to point to the importance of movement in the growth and development of young children. The recent months of the pandemic and quarantine have increased the concern over movement's connection to childhood development. This article shines a light on some of the research that substantiates the need for consistent commitment to developmentally appropriate movement for young children.

Keywords: importance of movement, young children, healthy lifestyle behaviors

1. Introduction

This past year of Covid and quarantine caused a justified concern for the well-being of young children for a myriad of reasons. One topic that is continually linked to the well-being of young children is that of movement. Research confirms that movement in young children helps increase memory, perception, language, attention, emotion and even decision making (Moyses, 2012). Infants learn through movement as they use their senses and developing physical skills to engage with their world. Movement is a large part of this engagement for infants as they explore by kicking, grasping, reaching, pulling, and letting go of objects (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009).

It is important for young children to be provided developmentally appropriate opportunities for movement. Research has shown that infants and toddlers are seeking self confidence in age-appropriate ways and movement can help them master challenges and gain that self-confidence. Infants, birth to 9 months, seek self-confidence through "security", infants, 8 months to 18 months, seek self-confidence through exploration, and toddlers, 16 to 36 months, seek self-confidence by forming their identity (Lally, 2008). The following lists are very basic movement suggestions for birth to three years of age (Moyses, 2012).

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0-6 months:

- Gently “cycle” her arms and legs
- Let him kick at your hands or a toy
- Dance with her
- Gently rock or swing him
- Play peek-a-boo, moving his hands to cover his eyes
- Let her play with spoons, a rubber ring, a soft doll or small rattles that she can grasp
- Lay him on his tummy for “tummy-time”
- Play with him on the floor

6-12 months:

- Dance with him;
- Let her explore by climbing or crawling (make sure she is supervised)
- Let him play with pop-up toys to help his hand-eye coordination
- Place a toy just out of reach to encourage her to move towards it
- Give him toys in the bath so he can practice pouring or squirting
- Stand her on the bed and gently bounce her
- Let him play with toys he can stack or simple puzzles
- Help her walk around without a walker

12-18 months (1– 1 ½ years):

- Take walks with him and talk about the things that you see
- Have her play with many different toys, such as shopping carts, doll strollers, small wagons and riding toys that can be pushed with her feet
- Let him play with toys that help him practice filling, dumping or stacking
- Allow her to play on safe, low places to practice climbing under, over, inside of, on top of and around
- Allow him to practice his new skills in many different places, such as inside, outside or at other houses
- Praise him for his new skills that he has learned

18-24 months (1 ½ – 2 years):

- Allow her to play inside and outside with lots of room to crawl, walk, run and jump
- Allow him to play inside in a soft play area with lots of pillows, mats and mattresses
- Let her use large blocks, boxes and blankets for building forts
- Create a safe obstacle course for him to play on
- Allow her to play with crayons, paper, dolls and doll clothes, play dough, snap together blocks, small blocks and small toy figures that help her grasp
- Allow him to grasp, hold, pour, scoop and squeeze different safe materials, such as sand boxes, water basins and play dough

- Allow her to feed herself with utensils and hold her own drink
- Draw and write with him; let him watch you and help him
- Allow her to turn pages of the books you read together

24-36 months (2-3 years):

- Help him discover his shadow on a sunny day; try and catch it
- Help her practice kicking by allowing her to kick a ball
- Play follow the leader with him; let him be the leader
- Dance to music with her
- Spend time outside with him playing on playgrounds or with other children
- Help her build forts for play inside
- Allow him to do simple crafts, such as coloring, cut and paste or string beads
- Allow her to start dressing and feeding herself
- Allow him to help with simple chores, such as setting the table
- By helping your child learn to move, you will not only help with their development, but you will also make sure that they are staying healthy and active. Developing movement skills early on can help promote a healthy lifestyle, learning and overall well-being

These lists are filled with movements that we often take for granted that can easily be worked into a young child's day at home, daycare, or pre-school. Rae Pica (2008) reminds us that the most important thing we can do is to provide children the time, space, and opportunity to move. Movement is a step to help guard against a sedentary lifestyle that can threaten young children today with the temptations of electronic devices and screen time (Clements, 2004). Young children that have frequent opportunities to have success in physical activity tend to associate a positive feeling toward movement building self-esteem and self-confidence (Pica, 2014).

Frosting's (1970) book, *Movement Education*, reminds us that movement can help a young child develop socially and emotionally by providing successful experiences. Research also highlights the stress relief factor connected with movement. The last year of Covid and quarantine brought the importance of movement to the forefront as we sought ways to relieve the stress and uncertainty caused by the Pandemic. Research has confirmed the association between movement and well-being (Jensen, 2005). It is up to those of us working with young children to help make sure that the time and space for movement are consistently provided for young children (Jensen, 2005).

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interests.

About the Author

Dr. Tami Shelley is an assistant professor in the College of Education, Auburn University at Montgomery, in Montgomery, Alabama. Her research interests include pre-service teacher preparation, mentorship, and early childhood development.

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