

E-clips

Transcript for the [Video](#):

Encouraging Physical Activity in Preschoolers

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Dr. Jeffrey Trawick-Smith, Host: Preschoolers are the most energetic people on earth. Preschool professionals are experts at channeling that energy in constructive ways—AND research is showing that physical exercise is not only good for young children’s physical development, but for their cognitive development as well. Watch while Physical Education Expert Dr. Darren Robert tells us about the latest research and how physical education is vital to preschool learning.

Dr. Darren Robert, Expert: Three to five year olds are exactly that, they are moving machines.

Narrator: Over the long winter, teacher Ashlee Parks realized that several of her preschoolers were particularly energetic.

Ashlee Parks, Teacher: During the winter months when we are unable to go outside, we really have to implement movement throughout the entire day, because we may be restricted to only being in the classroom. So my team and myself really had to think of creative ways of how we could get the children up and moving in a safe yet productive manner.

Dr. Robert: Two broad guidelines that I recommend for all centers and people teaching in preschools—whether it be public or private—is that first, it be safe. We need to keep our children safe, obviously because if they’re not safe, and they become injured, playtime or practice time stops and they don’t want to do it again. We’ve seen that over and over. So safety is a key and there are many resources to make sure that your environment remains safe. The second is developmentally appropriate. The physical activity setting—we need to make sure that it is age appropriate, which we understand, but also individually appropriate. So to provide very different equipment and opportunities for children is really important.

Dr. Robert: Signs that we have of cognitive abilities are movement experiences. While they’re physically active, all kinds of things are going on in their brain. All these new pathways are being developed. We know that early childhood specialists have a full plate—they have many things they must get done each day. We’re not asking you to put any of those aside and make room for physical activity; what we are asking is to infuse physical activity into your existing curriculum.

Narrator: Teacher Claudia Ahern finds many opportunities to combine physical activity with cognitive activities in her classroom.

Claudia Ahern, Teacher: 'Caps for Sale' is one of my favorite books. One of the reasons I love the book is because it's a great story, but you can also add movement with it. The children love when the peddler gets angry. They love to shake their hands; they love to stamp their feet. And if children are engaged in the story, they really take an active part.

Narrator: Claudia also incorporates physical activity into her classroom transitions.

Claudia Ahern: I love to do movement as transitions in the classroom. Recently I've been doing the skating transition, or we call it the sliding transition, where the children put their feet on paper plates and they are on carpet and they slide across the classroom. What's great about the sliding is children can explore their bodies: they can move slowly; some children like to turn around; some children like to use their arms for balance; some children fall and they pick themselves up. It's just a great opportunity for developmentally appropriate ways children can move.

Narrator: Managing physical activity within the classroom does take planning and preparation. Ashlee read and researched before introducing yoga to her preschool class.

Ashlee Parks: I was really nervous when I first started doing yoga, prior to actually having yoga classes here. I did a lot of reading about children's yoga, and they have some really great resources and really great books that tell you how to conduct yoga with children. It's something that took a lot of introduction in order for us to kind of catch on and understand what it was about. But as things progressed, it's something the children really look forward to. It's something we don't need a lot of space for; we can all fit on the carpet. And sometimes we will do it for 10 minutes and sometimes we will do it for 4, and I can tell that they are ready to be done with yoga after 4 minutes. It's nice, too, because you can vary it depending on the needs of the children that day.

Narrator: One of the biggest challenges to bringing physical activity into the classroom can be space.

Dr. Robert: Is there a place where you can have a blank wall that you can throw at a sheet target? There may be already where they can do some different kinds of butterfly stretches or giraffe stretches. Just things like that, that will actually enhance your program so much. Whether you use some timing device or whether the children have a free choice. They'll choose this... You'll find out. So you may be adding some more movement in different stations, but children love to move and infusing that into your educational curriculum is really what we're trying to make sure happens.

Claudia Ahern: Our dramatic play center was transformed into a fitness center. We did that by placing photos of children in different movement positions. By having the physical posters on the wall, it also helped the teachers engage the children. We also placed a mirror on the wall so the children could see themselves doing the movement. Probably the key to any successful dramatic play center is to have some intentional activities and have staff involvement.

Dr. Robert: It's very important to make sure that everyone in your teaching facility is on board, from the administrators down to our assistants. The best resource that any administrator can give you is to put you in touch with a certified physical education specialist.

Ashlee Parks: The director, Kristin, has been very supportive. As I said, we've had a challenging group of behaviors this year, as well as energy levels. And she has been very supportive of me taking initiative and trying to come up together with new things we could try. She was very excited about the yoga when I first mentioned it, and she helped me do some research as well.

Narrator: Involving parents is always an important goal of early childhood professionals. Claudia and Ashlee have had success encouraging parents to engage in physical activities with their children at home.

Claudia Ahern: We have a weekly newsletter which informs parents of what's happening in the classroom. I also invite parents into my classroom. If parents can see that it isn't difficult to move with their children, then they'll be like, "I can do that at home."

Parent: I love having Claudia's handout; it's so great to have it on the fridge at home. Nathan is just such an active kid, sometimes we run out of ideas for things to try, so having that handout...we can look at that and do something different with him every day. It keeps him interested, and he's just so active that he loves doing it.

Dr. Robert: What we're trying to get at is instilling these healthy movement habits early on. We know that young children develop most of their habits by the age of five. If choosing movement activity is instilled in these children by age five—we're all set. If they keep on going throughout their early childhood, their childhood, their teen years, into adult life, that's exactly what we want. That's what the research is telling us. That it starts in the preschool years, building those foundations that will enable a child to become competent and confident so that they will seek out those experiences later on.