

Early Years Physical Development Guidance

Physical Development

Physical activity is vital in children's all-round development, enabling them to pursue happy, healthy and active lives⁶. Gross and fine motor experiences develop incrementally throughout early childhood, starting with sensory explorations and the development of a child's strength, co-ordination and positional awareness through tummy time, crawling and play movement with both objects and adults. By creating games and providing opportunities for play both indoors and outdoors, adults can support children to develop their core strength, stability, balance, spatial awareness, co-ordination and agility. Gross motor skills provide the foundation for developing healthy bodies and social and emotional well-being. Fine motor control and precision helps with hand-eye co-ordination, which is later linked to early literacy. Repeated and varied opportunities to explore and play with small world activities, puzzles, arts and crafts and the practice of using small tools, with feedback and support from adults, allow children to develop proficiency, control and confidence.

Physical Development

ELG: Gross Motor Skills

Children at the expected level of development will:

- Negotiate space and obstacles safely, with consideration for themselves and others.
- Demonstrate strength, balance and coordination when playing.
- Move energetically, such as running, jumping, dancing, hopping, skipping and climbing.

ELG: Fine Motor Skills

Children at the expected level of development will:

- Hold a pencil effectively in preparation for fluent writing – using the tripod grip in almost all cases.
- Use a range of small tools, including scissors, paint brushes and cutlery.
- Begin to show accuracy and care when drawing.

Physical Development

EYFS Statutory Educational Programme: Physical activity is vital in children’s all-round development, enabling them to pursue happy, healthy and active lives. Gross and fine motor experiences develop incrementally throughout early childhood, starting with sensory explorations and the development of a child’s strength, co-ordination and positional awareness through tummy time, crawling and play movement with both objects and adults.

By creating games and providing opportunities for play both indoors and outdoors, adults can support children to develop their core strength, stability, balance, spatial awareness, co-ordination and agility. Gross motor skills provide the foundation for developing healthy bodies and social and emotional well-being. Fine motor control and precision helps with hand-eye co-ordination which is later linked to early literacy. Repeated and varied opportunities to explore and play with small world activities, puzzles, arts and crafts and the practice of using small tools, with feedback and support from adults, allow children to develop proficiency, control and confidence.



3 and 4-year-olds will be learning to:

Examples of how to support this:

Continue to develop their movement, balancing, riding (scooters, trikes and bikes) and ball skills.

Go up steps and stairs, or climb up apparatus, using alternate feet.

Skip, hop, stand on one leg and hold a pose for a game like musical statues.

Use large-muscle movements to wave flags and streamers, paint and make marks.

Start taking part in some group activities which they make up for themselves, or in teams.

Increasingly be able to use and remember sequences and patterns of movements which are related to music and rhythm.

Match their developing physical skills to tasks and activities in the setting. For example, they decide whether to crawl, walk or run across a plank, depending on its length and width.

Encourage children to transfer physical skills learnt in one context to another one. Suggestion: children might first learn to hammer in pegs to mark their Forest school boundary, using a mallet. Then, they are ready to learn how to use hammers and nails at the woodwork bench.

Encourage children to paint, chalk or make marks with water on large vertical surfaces. Suggestion: use walls as well as easels to stimulate large shoulder and arm movements. These experiences help children to 'cross the mid-line' of their bodies. When they draw a single line from left to right, say, they do not need to pass the paintbrush from one hand to another or have to move their whole body along.

Lead movement-play activities when appropriate. These will challenge and enhance children’s physical skills and development – using both fixed and flexible resources, indoors and outside.

Model the vocabulary of movement – ‘gallop’, ‘slither’ – and encourage children to use it. Also model the vocabulary of instruction – ‘follow’, ‘lead’, ‘copy’ – and encourage children to use it.

Encourage children to become more confident, competent, creative and adaptive movers. Then, extend their learning by providing opportunities to play outdoors in larger areas, such as larger parks and spaces in the local area, or through Forest or Beach school.



3 and 4-year-olds will be learning to:

Examples of how to support this:

Choose the right resources to carry out their own plan. For example, choosing a spade to enlarge a small hole they dug with a trowel.

Collaborate with others to manage large items, such as moving a long plank safely, carrying large hollow blocks.

Use one-handed tools and equipment, for example, making snips in paper with scissors.

Use a comfortable grip with good control when holding pens and pencils.

Show a preference for a dominant hand.

Explain why safety is an important factor in handling tools and moving equipment and materials. Have clear and sensible rules for everybody to follow.

You can begin by showing children how to use onehanded tools (scissors and hammers, for example) and then guide them with hand-over-hand help. Gradually reduce the help you are giving and allow the child to use the tool independently.

The tripod grip is a comfortable way to hold a pencil or pen. It gives the child good control. The pen is pinched between the ball of the thumb and the forefinger, supported by the middle finger with the other fingers tucked into the hand. You can help children to develop this grip with specially designed pens and pencils, or grippers. Encourage children to pick up small objects like individual gravel stones or tiny bits of chalk to draw with.

Be increasingly independent as they get dressed and undressed, for example, putting coats on and doing up zips.

Encourage children by helping them, but leaving them to do the last steps, such as pulling up their zip after you have started it off. Gradually reduce your help until the child can do each step on their own.



Children in reception will be learning to:

Examples of how to support this:

Revise and refine the fundamental movement skills they have already acquired:

- rolling
- crawling
- walking
- jumping
- running
- hopping
- skipping
- climbing

Provide regular access to appropriate outdoor space. Ensure there is a range of surfaces to feel, move and balance on, such as grass, earth and bark chippings.

Give children experience of carrying things up and down on different levels (slopes, hills and steps).

Provide a choice of open-ended materials to play that allow for extended, repeated and regular practising of physical skills like lifting, carrying, pushing, pulling, constructing, stacking and climbing.

Provide regular access to floor space indoors for movement.

Ensure that spaces are accessible to children with varying confidence levels, skills and needs.

Provide a wide range of activities to support a broad range of abilities.

Allow less competent and confident children to spend time initially observing and listening, without feeling pressured to join in.

Create low-pressure zones where less confident children can practise movement skills on their own, or with one or two others.

Model precise vocabulary to describe movement and directionality, and encourage children to use it.



Children in reception will be learning to:

Progress towards a more fluent style of moving, with developing control and grace.

Examples of how to support this:

Provide children with regular opportunities to practise their movement skills alone and with others.

Challenge children with further physical challenges when they are ready, such as climbing higher, running faster and jumping further.

Encourage children to conclude movements in balance and stillness.

Allow for time to be still and quiet. Suggestion: looking up at the sky, or sitting or lying in a den.

Develop the overall body strength, co-ordination, balance and agility needed to engage successfully with future physical education sessions and other physical disciplines including dance, gymnastics, sport and swimming.

Encourage children to be highly active and get out of breath several times every day.

Provide opportunities for children to, spin, rock, tilt, fall, slide and bounce.

Provide a range of wheeled resources for children to balance, sit or ride on, or pull and push. Two-wheeled balance bikes and pedal bikes without stabilisers, skateboards, wheelbarrows, prams and carts are all good options.



Children in reception will be learning to:

Develop their small motor skills so that they can use a range of tools competently, safely and confidently. Suggested tools: pencils for drawing and writing, paintbrushes, scissors, knives, forks and spoons.

Examples of how to support this:

Before teaching children the correct pencil grip and posture for writing, or how to use a knife and fork and cut with scissors, check:

- that children have developed their upper arm and shoulder strength sufficiently: they do not need to move their shoulders as they move their hands and fingers
- that they can move and rotate their lower arms and wrists independently

Help children to develop the core strength and stability they need to support their small motor skills. Encourage and model tummy-crawling, crawling on all fours, climbing, pulling themselves up on a rope and hanging on monkey bars.

Offer children activities to develop and further refine their small motor skills. Suggestions: threading and sewing, woodwork, pouring, stirring, dancing with scarves, using spray bottles, dressing and undressing dolls, planting and caring for plants, playing with small world toys, and making models with junk materials, construction kits and malleable materials like clay.

Regularly review the equipment for children to develop their small motor skills. Is it appropriate for the different levels of skill and confidence of children in the class? Is it challenging for the most dexterous children?

Continuously check how children are holding pencils for writing, scissors and knives and forks. Offer regular, gentle encouragement and feedback. With regular practice, the physical skills children need to eat with a knife and fork and develop an efficient handwriting style will become increasingly automatic.



Children in reception will be learning to:

Use their core muscle strength to achieve a good posture when sitting at a table or sitting on the floor.

Combine different movements with ease and fluency.

Confidently and safely use a range of large and small apparatus indoors and outside, alone and in a group.

Develop overall body-strength, balance, co-ordination and agility.

Examples of how to support this:

Provide areas for sitting at a table that are quiet, purposeful and free of distraction.

Give children regular, sensitive reminders about correct posture.

Provide different chairs at the correct height for the range of children in the class, so that their feet are flat on the floor or a footrest.

Provide different tables at the correct height for the range of children in the class. The table supports children's forearms. The top of the table is slightly higher than the height of the child's elbow flexed to 90 degrees.

Create obstacle courses that demand a range of movements to complete, such as crawling through a tunnel, climbing onto a chair, jumping into a hoop and running and lying on a cushion.

Provide opportunities to move that require quick changes of speed and direction. Suggestions: run around in a circle, stop, change direction and walk on your knees going the other way.

Encourage precision and accuracy when beginning and ending movements.

Encourage children to use a range of equipment. These might include: wheeled toys, wheelbarrows, tumbling mats, ropes to pull up on, spinning cones, tunnels, tyres, structures to jump on/off, den-making materials, logs and planks to balance on, A-frames and ladders, climbing walls, slides and monkey bars.



Children in reception will be learning to:

Further develop and refine a range of ball skills including: throwing, catching, kicking, passing, batting, and aiming.

Develop confidence, competence, precision and accuracy when engaging in activities that involve a ball.

Develop the foundations of a handwriting style which is fast, accurate and efficient.

Examples of how to support this:

Provide a range of different sized 'balls' made from familiar materials like socks, paper bags and jumpers that are softer and slower than real balls.

Introduce full-sized balls when children are confident to engage with them.

Introduce tennis balls, ping pong balls, beach balls and balloons.

Introduce a range of resources used to bat, pat and hit a ball, modelling how to do this and giving children plenty of time for practice.

Introduce children to balls games with teams, rules and targets when they have consolidated their ball skills.

Encourage children to draw freely.

Engage children in structured activities: guide them in what to draw, write or copy.

Teach and model correct letter formation.

Continuously check the process of children's handwriting (pencil grip and letter formation, including directionality). Provide extra help and guidance when needed.

Plan for regular repetition so that correct letter formation becomes automatic, efficient and fluent over time.



Children in reception will be learning to:

Further develop the skills they need to manage the school day successfully:

- lining up and queuing
- mealtimes

Examples of how to support this:

Carefully explain some of the rules of lining up and queuing, such as not standing too close or touching others. Give children simple verbal and visual reminders.

Celebrate, praise and reward children as they develop patience, turn-taking and self-control when they need to line up and wait.

Teach and model for children how to eat with good manners in a group, taking turns and being considerate to others.

