

COACH'S CORNER

Coach's Corner is a DIEEC blog dedicated to providing fresh ideas for all early childhood education professionals.

Active Play

By Meghan Pallante

Active play is important for the physical development of young children. Skills such as gross motor, depth perception, and visual-motor coordination are enhanced when children engage in physical education. Physical activity also helps to prevent childhood obesity. However, there are many more benefits to active, physical play that extend beyond physical development!



Meghan Pallante
DIEEC quality improvement specialist
and ECE blogger



Benefits of active play in early childhood education

- Problem-solving- Active play gives children opportunities to find creative solutions. Some examples include deciding on the best way to climb a structure or finding creative hiding places during hide and seek or tag.
- Following directions- Games like “Simon Says” or “Red Light, Green Light” require children to listen and follow the commands of their teacher or their peers.
- Social skills- Children will naturally work on skills such as taking turns and conflict resolution.
- Attention and focus- Many children who may struggle with focusing on tasks in the classroom are able to “stretch” their focus a bit outdoors or while engaging in activities that use their whole bodies.

Incorporating physical activity in your program

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), children under 5 years should have up to 3 hours of active play per day. The good news is that you do not need to have any fancy equipment to make this happen! While children do enjoy playing on swings or on climbing equipment, there are plenty of ways to create active play experiences without those things.

Consider adding materials to your space that naturally encourage more active play. Ideas include:

- balls
- hula hoops
- ride on toys
- jump ropes
- ribbon sticks
- scarves
- push toys

When there is no stationary play equipment, children are more likely to use their imaginations to come up with their own games or activities!



During the winter months it can seem difficult to get the recommended daily dose of physical activity. However, there are many ways to make sure your kids are still active! Be sure that you ask families to send in clothing for cold-weather and snow play, and have warm clothes on hand for yourself as well! You can also choose to go outside for shorter lengths of time, more frequently.

Below are some activities that can be done indoors or outdoors.

- **Obstacle courses**- Programs can create obstacle courses for children using simple items such as hula hoops, cones, boxes, jump ropes, etc. If you have concrete space outdoors, educators can even draw out obstacle courses using chalk.
- **Movement games**- Ask the children to use their bodies to act out different animals or actions.
- **Bubble chasing**- This is a great option for our youngest learners! When blowing bubbles encourage mobile infants and toddlers to try to “catch” them.
- **“Ice” skating (indoors)**- Cover the bottom of children’s shoes with parchment paper and put a rubber band around the shoe to keep the parchment paper in place. Let the children pretend to skate around the room. This activity works best on carpet.

As technology continues to play a big role in our lives, it is more important than ever that we encourage our children to be active. Keep in mind that not all active play has to be in the form of planned or group activities. Giving children time to have free play outdoors or in an open space indoors is another great way to encourage active play.

Professional Learning Experiences

- [Sing, Dance, and Stomp \(Hybrid-virtual/in-person\)- DIEEC, March 2025](#)
- [Physical Activity Learning Sessions \(PALS\) \(Virtual\)- DIEEC, April 2025](#)

Additional Resources

- [The Benefits of Active Play for Children \(First Five Years\)](#)
- [Rocking and Rolling: Learning to Move \(NAEYC\)](#)
- [Physical and Motor Development for Preschoolers \(ECLKC\)](#)