



## Activity: Jelly beans

This activity is based on actions that encourage a wide range of movements. It is important that the children understand what they are expected to do when the name of each kind of bean is called out. The age of the children will determine how quickly they remember the actions, but they can also copy the lead person who does the actions as they are called out. This is particularly important to help children with hearing impairment fully take part.

- **Broad bean** arms and legs wide apart
- **Runner bean** running on the spot
- **Jumping bean** jumping feet together from side to side
- **Chilli bean** standing legs together arms across each other, hands rubbing opposite arms to keep warm
- **Beans on toast** curled up on the floor, arms and legs tucked in
- **Jelly bean** moving body in a swaying movement from the head down to look like a jelly wobbling
- **Baked bean** lying down flat on your back as though you were sunbathing

## Getting children active!

**'Children develop more rapidly, physically, intellectually, emotionally and socially during their early years than at any time in their lives, and each aspect of this development is interdependent.'**

Learning to move and moving to learn in the nursery years in *The British Journal of Physical Education*, vol18, no4, Sutcliffe et al (1987)

How can you get every child active for at least 60 minutes a day? This is the target recommended by Change4Life, the social marketing movement backed by the Department of Health that aims to help every family in England eat well, move more and live longer. Similar initiatives are running in Scotland and Wales. And this year, as part of National School Grounds Week, LTL is launching *The big play experiment!* designed to get as many children as possible UK wide engaging in more physical activity by taking part in enjoyable outdoor play.

### The importance of active play

According to Change4Life, nine out of 10 children today could grow up dangerously overweight, exposing themselves to life-threatening diseases like cancer, type 2 diabetes and heart disease.

Physical activity, however, as well as contributing to maintaining a healthy weight can reduce these future risks, and is also important for healthy growth and development of the musculoskeletal and cardiorespiratory systems.

In addition, for younger children especially, it also promotes the healthy development of gross motor skills (co-ordination, balance, movement etc). And research has shown a positive correlation between physical activity and academic achievement, as well as an improvement in children's behaviour and the development of social interaction skills.

Above all, enjoying physical activity from a young age can help establish an enthusiasm for exercise that lasts throughout childhood and into adulthood too.

### How much is enough?

In England, the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) states that 'the recommended 60 minutes may be achieved through several short bursts of activity of 10 minutes or more'.

As ever, parents have a major role to play, but early years settings can also do their bit to help. The outdoors, after all, is the best place for children to play games and experience physical play. Outdoors they can experiment, make noise, develop



and refine gross and fine motor skills and learn to play together.

This Playnotes looks at the experiences young children need in active play, ideas on how to encourage active play and five fun adult-led activities to help get children on the move. Although devised to work in conjunction with the National School Grounds Week Early Years Outdoors poster (see 'Further resources'), the advice and activities recommended here can be introduced into your setting at anytime of the year.

### The experiences children need in active play

Outdoor provision is vital for ensuring all children experience the pleasures and benefits of active play. It offers many opportunities for physical, movement-

based play – child-led and adult-led – especially through the amount of space and freedom available. And by monitoring provision, you can ensure the whole range of physical experiences children need to develop are on offer, including:

- **balance** – this is the central component of movement and fundamental to every action whether moving or still, and includes poise and stretch. **Great resources include:** a rope or chalk line on the ground; a low wall; a swing for babies
- **co-ordination** – this is the ability to move different body parts at the same time to achieve some end, such as co-ordination between the eyes and parts of the body. **Great resources include:** a wide variety of objects to roll, throw and catch; step ladder and

### Activity: Shapes and colours

This activity can be played independently once the children have practiced it a few times.

Draw and colour large shapes on the ground with chalk. Call out the shape or colour and ask the children to move to it accordingly. You could vary directions such as 'walk slowly to the pink square', 'hop to the green circle' or 'crawl to the yellow triangle'. Numbers or letters could be used to add variety.



### Activity: Traffic lights

This activity is based on the three traffic light colours: red, amber and green. Each colour called out determines what the children should be doing.

- **Red** standing still
- **Amber** running on the spot
- **Green** running around

To play this game the children need to learn to listen to the person leading the activity while they are on the move.

The lead person should stand in the centre of the outdoor space to help encourage the children to fully use all the space around them.

To help the children know what instruction they are being given, coloured scarves or coloured cards could be held up at the same time as calling out the colour. This would be especially important if there were any children with hearing impairments in the group.

Once the children are used to following instructions when the three traffic light colours are called out, other features could be added into the activity to make it more challenging, such as:

- **Roundabout** must run round in a small circle
- **Speed bump** jump in the air before running on
- **Reverse** run backwards
- **Traffic jam** run slowly
- **Road clear** (used after traffic jam) run around normally

There are lots of possibilities and the children might like to think of their own ideas to add.



### Activity: This is the way

Children love action rhymes and songs so why not take them outside to perform on a larger scale? Sing the following rhyme, with the children doing suitable actions. The tune is 'Here we go round the mulberry bush'.

*This is the way we walk to nursery,  
walk to nursery, walk to nursery.  
This is the way we walk to nursery  
on a bright and sunny morning.*

The subsequent verses can have different actions such as jumping, hopping and skipping. The weather could also be changed, for example 'this is the way we splash to nursery on a wet and rainy morning'.



strength (activity increases the density of bones); gross motor strength and fine manipulative strength; being able to judge the selection of strength for the task. **Great resources include:** places for clambering up and jumping off; wheeled vehicles; things to fill and carry, push and pull; places for babies to pull up to standing.

- **timing and movement fluency (agility)** – judging when to move and when to stop; moving at the right time; making those fine adjustments to achieve your aim; being able to follow one movement through with another. **Great resources include:** space to run; ropes to jump over; targets for throwing games; music to dance to; obstacle course.
- **flexibility** – being able to move the body easily to and through a range of positions. **Great resources include:** places to crawl into and through; traversing wall; obstacle course; dance music and props.

### Your role in encouraging active play

Although equipment and resources play an important role in helping support active play (see 'Further resources') the adult's role is vital too. Try to:

- join children in their pleasure of finding out what their body can do, pushing the limits of this and the satisfaction of mastery
- help children become aware of how active play makes them feel, emotionally and physically
- encourage children's own exploration

decorators' brushes; instruments to hit; low surfaces for babies to cruise along.

- **sense of body** – this is the awareness of different parts of the body and where they are in relation to one another or the rest of the body; how they work together and where the 'edges' of your body are. **Great resources include:** floaty scarves; music; big pieces of cloth to wrap around body and to run with; blankets for babies to lie on.

- **sense of space** – awareness of spaces and objects, and being able to move in those spaces by knowing where your body is in them. Being able to judge how far away something is (depth perception) – and in what direction things are – links this to co-ordination. **Great resources include:** a tunnel; tractor tyre climbing frame; bikes linked to role-play; steps and slope for toddlers to go up and down.
- **strength** – muscle tone and bone

### Which activities do children love best?

Finding out which activities children love the most will help you plan your provision. At the same time you can encourage children to think about how active they are, and make the link between activity and health. Children can:

- vote for their favourite activity using, for example, tokens
- explore the relationship between how they feel – how hot or out of breath they are – and how active they've been
- talk about activity – for example, sequencing a typical day, from being in bed to walking to nursery etc

More ideas are available on the National School Grounds Week Early Years Outdoors poster (see 'Further resources').



## Case study: Woodberry Day Nursery

Outdoor active play is central to the ethos at Woodberry Day Nursery in Sholing, Southampton, where the staff are always looking for new ideas to complement the free-flow access they offer their pre-school children. Manager Kathy Beauchamp explains why:

'Physical activity is vitally important as it promotes gross motor skills and offers a way of releasing energy. Young children need to be active while they are learning – if they sit still for long periods they lose concentration. And some children have restricted opportunities for outdoor play at home so offering them free-flow in an outdoor environment at the nursery is vital.'

Adult and child-led activities are daily events, and children are introduced to the benefits of being active and healthy in a fun interactive way, as LTL's early years development officer Ginny Wright discovered when she visited to try out the five activities suggested in this edition of Playnotes.

'They used a number of fun ideas,' says Ginny, 'showing that even the youngest child can make the link between activity and health. For example, the children really responded



to simple questions after each activity such as 'Do you feel hot or cold? Who looks red? Does your chest move up and down when you put your hand on it? And giving the children tokens so they could vote on their favourite activity helped the practitioners find out which active games they liked best.'

As Kathy points out, evaluating active games in a fun way offers children the

best opportunity for learning about the benefits of being on the move: 'Anything that enables them to gain awareness of the changes in their bodies when they are being active and physical is hugely important. It plants the seed for further understanding and awareness that can continue throughout their childhood and help them eventually become healthy active adults.'

and creativity in the ways they use the space around them, its features and resources

- include adult-led activities to introduce new ideas and skills (see activities in this Playnotes)
- ensure resources in adult-led activities are made available to the children for child-led follow-on (and watch how the children take the play forward)
- observe and listen closely, noticing what individual children do and what they appear to be thinking: plan to enhance and extend their activity as they become ready
- be alert to movement difficulties – identifying these as early as possible and planning appropriate support is vital as they can impact on every aspect of a child's life
- avoid allowing stereotypical behaviours so that, for example, all children are encouraged to develop fine motor skills and to take part in energetic activities.



### Activity: Sky writing

For this activity the children will need to create 'sky pens' by tying long strips of fabric, cellophane or ribbons to sticks. Help younger children hang on to their sky pens by attaching the 'pens' to a hair band which can fit over their wrists.

Start by encouraging children to experiment with varying arm movements, such as: waving arms up and down or flicking wrists. Encourage them to improve their 'sky writing' by asking them to draw particular shapes and actions such as a 'circle', 'zig-zag' or 'up-down', 'side to side' etc.

Once they are confident, you can extend the activity into a game of follow-the leader asking them to run, hop or skip, pulling streamers behind them while imitating 'sky-writing' actions.

### Further resources

For ideas on how to explore the concepts of fun, activity and the link between being active and healthy, see the 2009 National School Grounds Week Early Years Outdoors poster. See also:

- Playnotes *Enabling free-flow* (children need free-flow access to their outside space to become more active outdoors through their own initiative)
- Curriculum Support *What experiences should children have through outdoor provision?*

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