

Throughout childhood playtime should be an amazing adventure and a special time you share with your child as a parent. Sharing fun times together gives your child opportunities to learn about who he or she is in the world, develop knowledge and skills and build love and trust.

Children need lots of different activities and environments to explore. Your child will love singing, making noise, dancing, lots of mess, being imaginative and copying what others are doing. They have endless energy and are developing strength and coordination every day. All the skills they are learning are helping to set the foundations for different forms of physical activity throughout life.

Australian guidelines for physical activity for toddlers and pre schoolers are currently being developed.

The following guides from *The National Association for Sport and Physical Education in America* give us an idea about toddlers' and preschoolers' physical activity levels.

- Toddlers and preschoolers should have at least 60 minutes and up to several hours per day of daily, **unstructured** (free play) physical activity
- Toddlers should have at least 30 minutes a day of structured (adult-led) physical activity and preschoolers at least 60 minutes
- They should not be still for more than 60 minutes at a time except when sleeping

(<http://www.aahperd.org/naspe/template.cfm?template=toddlers.html>) Accessed 1 June 2009

Unstructured physical activity or free play is the main form of activity for toddlers and preschoolers. We have provided some ideas for you to set up play areas so your child can explore many different ways to play. We have also given you some activities you and your child can do together. Remember, play should be led by your child. Let them decide what they would like to do.

Children move in three main ways and to help you keep your toddler active we have provided information on body movement, balance, and playing with objects.

Body Movement - moving the body in different ways such as running, jumping, leaping or hopping. Two- to three-year-olds can roll, crawl, creep, walk, walk on tiptoes, jump and climb, but can often fall when running. They need to rest briefly between short structured activity sessions.

Unstructured play ideas

Jumping challenges – think of ways your child can jump over, on or off things

- Small wooden blocks
- Firm boxes
- Mini trampolines
- Chalk or rope to make a river to jump over. Swing the arms when jumping for distance
- Hanging streamers (try to jump up and touch)
- A row of plastic bottles or milk cartons (young children can do a wide legged jump over each one)
- Bubble wrap taped to the floor
- Pillows

Obstacles to move around by walking, running, hopping, galloping

- Hoops
- Plastic drink bottles filled with sand
- Paths
- Hopscotch grids
- Boxes



Other things that stimulate moving the body

- Music
- Hobby horses (head made out of a sock on a broom stick)
- Scarves or a streamer stuck to a paddle pop stick
- A grassy slope to run or roll down
- Kites (paper bag on a short string with a crepe paper tail)
- Tricycles or riding toys

Structured play ideas

Read a book - get ideas for ways to move

- Animals - hop like a kangaroo, crawl like a lion
- A train - moving their arms around
- March with swinging arms
- Run, take off, jump up like a plane, touch the sky
- Step or bounce lightly like a spacemen
- Make a pizza or planet. Scatter pieces of paper, blocks or colour lids around. Have them run and collect the objects to put on their base (a hoop or chalk circle)

Draw a picture afterwards (easels provide ideal body and arm positioning for young children; chalk on the footpath washes off after the rain and is great fun).

Help your child **cut or tear** out pictures of people walking, running, crawling, hopping or marching and help your child make their own book of movement ideas or stick the pictures onto a small square box, roll it over, and together copy the action that lands on top.

Use music and singing

- Dancing – encourage them to bounce to the beat
- Sing songs or say rhymes that involve moving the body such as the "Holey Pokey" or "If You're Happy and You Know It" - jump around etc

Go for a walk or a pretend adventure

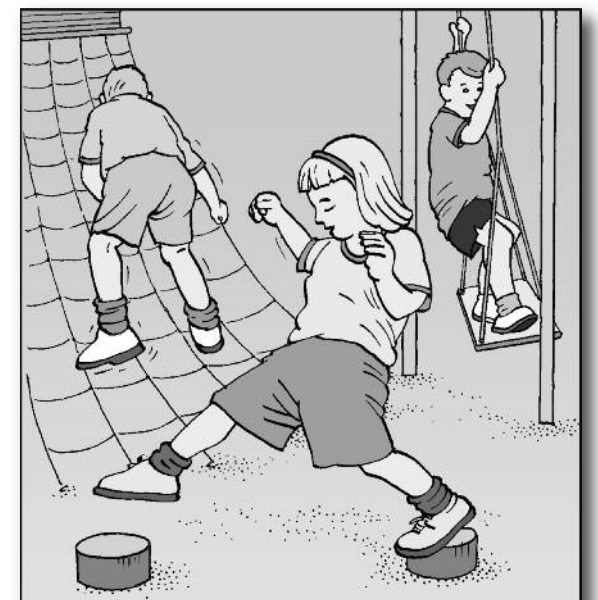
- Go for a walk and hold hands jump or hop over the cracks in the footpath
- Make a long trail with a paper streamer weighted down at intervals with a brick or bottle filled with water or sand for them to follow. It could go around the clothesline, under a branch, over a step etc. Make it fun by hiding somewhere along the trail
- Make an obstacle course crawl through tunnels (large cardboard box), go over and under low obstacles (benches, chairs or the washing basket). Children can help set up or put away by pushing and pulling the lighter boxes and baskets

Balance - balancing and stability skills also involve rotating, stretching and twisting. Two - to three-year-olds may want to hold hands with an adult when walking on a low beam, stepping over the rungs of a ladder or standing on one foot. They like to climb and balance on high objects like tabletops and chairs but will need supervision. They bend over easily without falling and pick up toys from a standing position.

Unstructured play ideas

Stepping stones (step or jump on and off, stand on with feet together or on one foot)

- Sheets of newspaper
- Rubber jigsaw mats
- Hoops
- Cushions
- Small boxes or milk cartons that crush
- Carpet squares



- Shapes drawn in chalk

Balance beams/obstacles to walk along

- Ladders (put the ladder down and step over the rungs)
- Planks
- Large wooden blocks
- String, streamers or tape
- Chalk lines
- Climbing frame

Tips:

- Focus eyes on a fixed object straight ahead when balancing
- Breathe deeply and encourage stillness
- Show them how to tense muscles that can hold firm and stretch against gravity – and then release or relax and flop down

Structured play ideas

Read a book - look for pictures that suggest poses or look for books with ideas for children's yoga, Pilates or tai-chi moves

- Pretend to be a tree, one foot is the trunk holding firmly to the ground while the arms branch up. Let the branches move gently without making the tree fall over
- Squat like a frog waiting for a fly
- Fly like superman from tummy lying, lift head arms and legs up off the floor
- Stand still like a butterfly and let your wings gradually unfold

Let your child **draw** a picture afterwards and tell you what they have drawn - have them lie on their tummy propping on elbows – a small cushion under the chest may make this easier.

Help your child to find pictures of people balancing in different positions, help them **cut or tear** out the pictures and make a poster together.

Use music and singing

- Statues – when the music stops have them hold a position in a particular pose such as on one foot
- Use songs that involve controlled movements such as “Heads and shoulders, knees and toes”
- Have them dance within a chalk circle or hoop – this helps children to work in their own space

Go for a walk or a pretend adventure

- Find things to walk along like cracks in the path
- Practise walking up steps with one foot on each step
- Go bird watching where you have to stand still and look when you hear a bird
- Hold their hand to ensure safety so they can walk along a higher garden edge or low wall
- Make a path or maze for them to follow out of cartons that crush when they step on them
- Trace their hands and feet with chalk to make a track - step on the footprints and put hands down on the hand prints
- Pretend to be Dora the Explorer or another character

Playing with Objects – such as kicking or throwing a ball. Two - to three-year-olds can kick a small stationary ball forward, throw a ball overhand, but with little accuracy and fling a ball in any direction. Like to toss, drop a ball or beanbag into a bin. Catch a rolled ball by trapping it with arms, hands and body. Attempt to catch a thrown ball by extending arms directly in front of body and trapping it against the body. Ride a tricycle using pedals some of the time. Shake a rhythm instrument.

Unstructured play ideas

Balls (use balls with different size texture and weight - beach ball, rubber ball, foam ball, balloons, balls made of newspaper - keep them handy in a washing basket)

- Build or find slopes to roll balls down, an unoccupied slippery dip is good for this
- Place a balloon on the end of a streamer and suspend it overhead so they can hit it with cardboard cylinder, soft bat,

half a pool noodle or rolled up newspaper

- Make bean bags by putting split peas in odd socks
- Blow bubbles

Targets and goals

- Basketball hoop
- Chalk targets on the wall
- Plastic containers
- Skittles made from soft drink bottle slightly weighted with water or sand

Tip:

Encourage children to watch a moving object such as a ball with their “eyes”. The eyes help to co-ordinate the correct arm movements for activities like catching.

Structured play ideas

Read a book play games that you see in stories or in books about sport

- Use simple objects for bats and goals, for example rolled newspaper for bats and boxes for goals to stretch the imagination
- Play games at your child's level – the rules will change regularly with a 2-year-old

Write up the “scores” with pavement chalk on a wall or chalk board. Even young children can do a down line or a circle to represent what they see as a score.

Help them **cut or tear** out pictures of people playing sport and make a book of game ideas.

Use music and singing

- Use music to provide a time limit – “lets see how many bean bags we can get into the box before the music finishes” – also useful for packing away toys
- Use music to define a speed or a rhythm for throwing, bouncing or catching

Go for a walk or a pretend adventure

- Carry balls, frisbees and skipping ropes in the car so you can play at a park or the beach
- Walk to a park with a basket or netball ring, soccer goal. Modify games for their age, eg practise throwing the ball as high as the ring
- Go and watch children playing sport for a short while, then play a fun “game” with your child
- Find a bike path where your child can ride a push along or pedal bike
- Go to a park with swings or other equipment that moves
- Make a kicking tee from a sticky tape roll, a bean bag or a quoit

