

Move More, Learn Better: How Movement and Play Help Your Child Thrive in School!

Did you know that getting your kids moving can greatly impact their ability to focus, solve problems, remember information, get better grades, and feel calm, confident, at ease and happy?!

Why Play and Movement Matter

Physical activity increases blood flow to the brain, creates regulating body chemistry, and enhances the growth of neural networks in the brain. The result is that more movement helps the entire nervous system work like a well oiled machine! Active kids are much better at sitting still and paying attention when it's time to learn. Movement and play also help kids process and manage emotions, and face challenges at school. Climbing, running, pushing, pulling, tossing, catching, building and exploring all help kids develop cognitive skills, coordination, internal regulation and resilience.



Get Them moving! Their lives depend on it!

The research shows that **sedentary kids** are more likely to have attention difficulties, lower academic achievement, poorer executive functioning, and are more prone to anxiety, depression, stress, and health challenges. Whereas **active kids** have higher levels of brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF), which supports learning; have better social skills; have stronger immune systems; and have higher self-esteem and achievement in school.



Understanding Your Child's Sensory World: How Their Nervous System Shapes Learning and Behavior

Our neural wiring is shaped by our life experiences. Every interaction, movement, and sensation contribute to the framework of how we learn and process the world around us. The Pyramid of Learning illustrates the foundational layers required for higher-level learning to occur. The idea is if any of the lower, foundational layers of the system (e.g. the central nervous system, sensory systems, and development of sensory motor systems) are weak or missing, it can make it much harder to build the cognitive skills at the top. For example, if your child has trouble with their sense of balance, their vestibular system and/or their sense of their body in space, their proprioceptive sense, they might find it difficult to sit still, write neatly, or focus in class. If your child is sensitive to tactile stimulation, they may have increased anxiety, melt downs, challenges in social situations, and difficulty engaging with materials at school. One of the most powerful means to ensure the foundation is strong, is to get the body moving and exploring the world in a variety of ways!

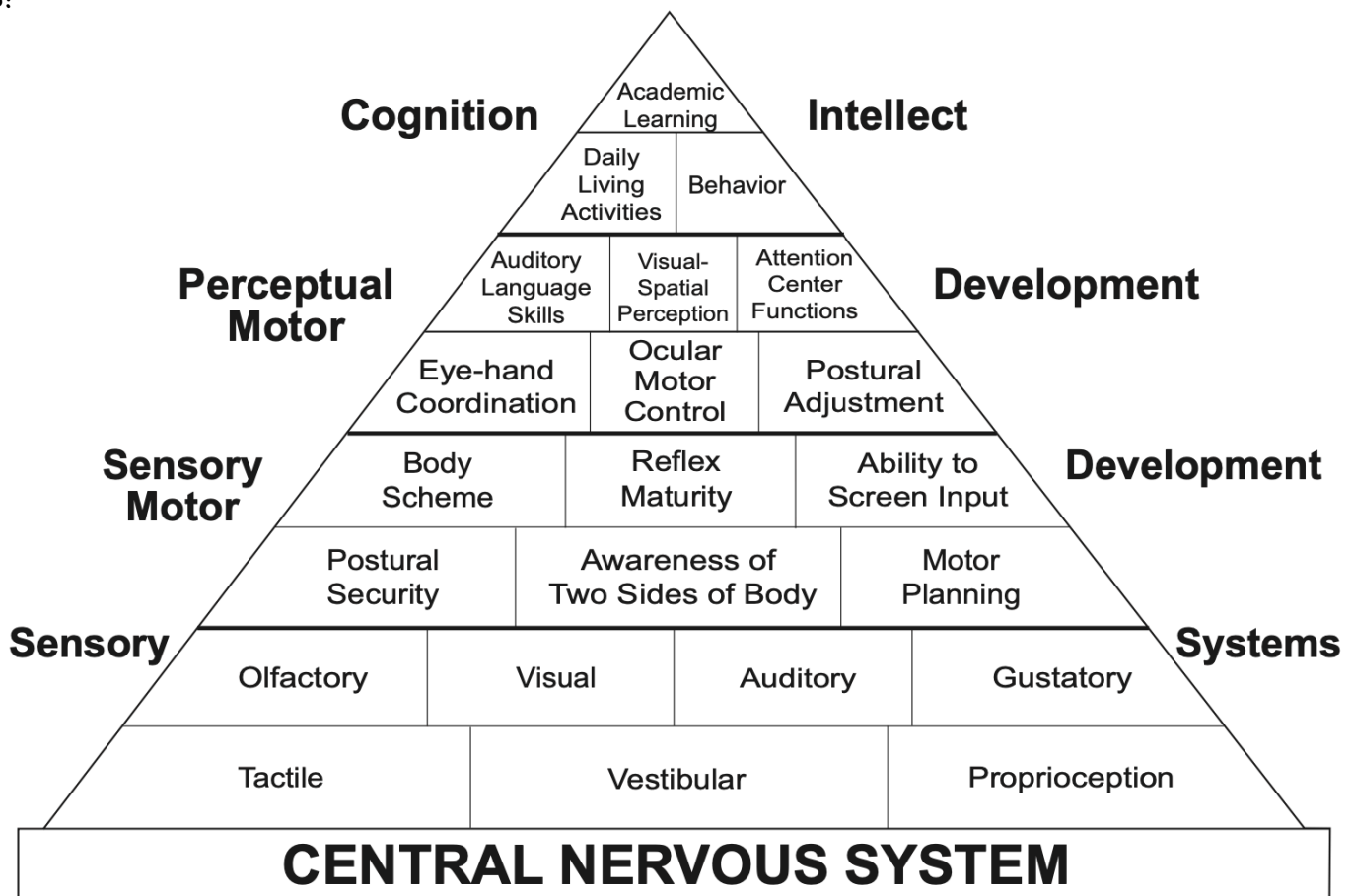


Figure 1-3. Printed with permission.
K. Taylor (personal communication, Jan 6, 2022)

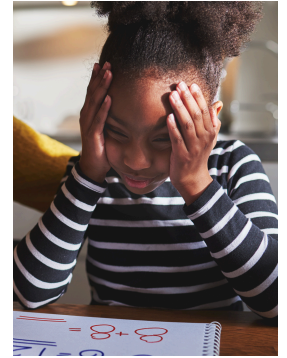
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Pyramid Of Learning

Some signs your child needs more movement:



- Fidgeting and having trouble sitting still
- Difficulty Paying Attention
- Mood swings
- Restlessness or Hyperactivity
- Poor Balance or Coordination
- Trouble with Fine Motor Skills
- Emotional Outbursts or Frustration
- Seeking Excessive Sensory Input
- Trouble Falling Asleep or Staying Asleep
- Low Energy or Sluggishness
- Frustration with physical tasks
- Difficulty with Transitions



How to Overcome Barriers

1. Instead of: "Sit and watch TV" ----> Try: "Dance during commercials"
2. Instead of: Driving to school ----> Try: Bike/scooter or park farther away to walk
3. Instead of playing Minecraft on the computer ----> Try: Creating a real-life Minecraft adventure, scavenger hunt and obstacle course.
4. Instead of: Carrying their backpack for them ----> Try: "Superheroes carry their OWN gear. Show me your strong muscles!"
5. Instead of: Screen time after school ----> Try: 15-minute "The Floor is Lava" game.
6. Instead of: Elevators/escalators ----> Try: "I'll race you up the stairs!"
7. Instead of: Board games ----> Try: Active games (Twister, freeze tag, balloon volleyball)
8. Instead of: "Go to your room" ----> Try: "Go jump on the trampoline 10 times" or run 5 laps around the yard.
9. Instead of: Telling them to do 10 jumping jacks ----> Ask them to be the coach and lead an exercise, or ask them to teach you a TikToc dance.
10. Instead of: Defaulting to screen time ----> Have them earn screen time (e.g. 10 laps around the yard: 10 min screens; 10 cross crawls: 2 min screens.



Movement Ideas for Home



Indoor Obstacle Course - Use cushions, chairs, blankets, string, tape, toys, etc. to create a course for crawling, jumping, crashing, weight bearing, and balancing.

Pillow Balance Walk - Place pillows on the floor and walk across without falling.

Dance Party - Play upbeat music and have a family dance-off.

Simon Says (Active Version) - Include commands like "Simon says do 5 jumps jumping jacks" or "Simon says crawl like a bear."

Balloon Volleyball - Keep a balloon in the air without letting it touch the ground.

Animal Walks Charades - Pretend to be different animals (frog jumps, crab walks, snake slithers, etc.) and see if others can guess what you are.

Yoga for Kids - Follow along with kid-friendly yoga videos (e.g. Cosmic Kids Yoga on YouTube).

Stair Climbing (if available) - Time them to see how fast they can go up and down safely.

Musical Chairs (Movement Version) - Instead of sitting, have them do exercises (e.g., jumping jacks, squats) when the music stops.

Sticky Note Scavenger Hunt - Write body parts (knee, elbow, forehead) on notes and hide them. Kids must stick each note to the matching body part—while bear-walking!

Silent Speed Challenges - "How fast can you tiptoe to the kitchen and back?"

Freeze Dance - Dance when the music plays, freeze when it stops.

Charades (Active Version) - Act out sports, types of jobs or vehicles while others guess.

Scavenger Hunt with Movement - Hide objects and have kids run, skip, or hop to find them.

Gamifying it (e.g., "Can you do 10 jumps before the microwave beeps?")

Shadow Tag - Play tag by stepping on each other's shadows (outdoor/sunny spot).

Jump Rope (or pretend jump rope) - Great for coordination.

Hula Hooping -great for midline crossing, coordination and rhythm

Hopscotch (Indoor/Outdoor) - Use tape on the floor for an indoor version. Use chalk outdoors.

Fitness Dice - Make or buy dice with exercises (e.g., 5 squats, 3 jumps).

Speed Clean-Up Race - Set a timer and see who can pick up toys the fastest.

Laundry Basket Toss - Ball up socks and play basket ball into basket.

Window Wiping Dance - Play music while cleaning windows with big arm movements.

Backyard Soccer/Kickball - Use any soft ball for safe indoor/outdoor play.

Bike/Scooter Ride - If you have a driveway or safe area.

Nature Walk with Challenges - Skip every 10 steps, jump over cracks, nature scavenger hunt

Wall Ball - Throw a tennis ball against a wall and catch it (variations: clap before catching).

Basketball Dribbling - Practice dribbling around cones or shooting hoops.

Soccer Drills - Kick a ball between cones, against a fence, or practice footwork.

Tetherball - If you have a setup, kids can play solo by hitting the ball in circles.

Backyard Tag (Solo Version) - Chase shadows, butterflies, or pretend to evade "lava."

Bug or Rock Hunt - Walk, squat, and stretch while searching for critters or cool stones.

Gardening - Digging, carrying soil, or watering plants builds strength and coordination.

Rainy Day Fun - See who can make the biggest puddle splash; Race leaves or twigs down "rivers"



REMEMBER:

- Small changes add up! Even 5-minutes of movement rewires the brain and body for better focus, sleep, and mood.
- Movement isn't optional—it's how kids' bodies and brains grow optimally. Daily periods of movement can actually change the trajectory of your child's entire life! Our bodies are meant to move!
- Movement is a powerful tool, but if you notice persistent emotional distress, developmental delays, or extreme avoidance, please seek professional support.

THANK YOU!

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About the Author:

I have worked in classrooms for 25+ years. First as an elementary school teacher, and now as an occupational therapist for 2-22 year olds. I have led several workshops for teachers to address the sensory, behavioral, and developmental needs of children. I am so passionate about helping children, teens and young adults learn and thrive through becoming aligned with and moving their bodies! I'm also passionate about helping teachers find greater joy and fulfillment in their role as educators. ♥

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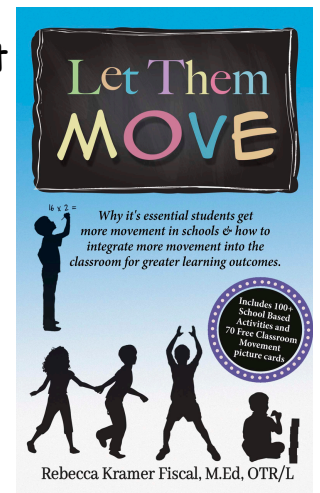
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Interested in learning more about the impact of movement on the body and brain? Why it's even more imperative in this day and age we get kids moving during the school day? And many ways to get your students up and moving? Check out my book: Let Them Move [HERE!](#)



Please contact me if you have any questions!
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