

## HELPING KIDS

# *acquire and develop their motor skills*

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Motor skills are the basis of all our movements, since they allow us to explore and adapt to various aspects of our environment and to interact with others. A motor skill is a sequence of coordinated movements designed to efficiently accomplish a given task (e.g., walking, running, picking up an object, moving a table, etc.).

Early childhood specialists recognize how important it is for children to acquire basic motor skills and engage in regular physical activity, because these skills:

- are essential for the child's **overall development** (proven physical, social, emotional, cognitive and linguistic benefits) and **academic success** (concentration and attention, which are necessary to learn reading, writing and math skills);
- help to **maintain a physically active lifestyle into adolescence and adulthood.**

### WHY TAKE ACTION?

Motor skills are the first steps toward learning how to play sports and perform complex movements. A lack of motor skills, which contributes to a loss of pleasure and interest in physical activity, is also recognized as a **determining factor** in teenagers' decision to **stop** engaging in physical activities and sports. A lack of physical fitness and skill is one of the barriers to being active for close to 50% of girls and 25% of boys aged 10 to 17 years. In addition, motor skills are closely tied to socioeconomic status: youth from low-income areas have less motor skill proficiency than those from higher-income areas.

### **Because many factors influence the development of motor skills**

Although the stages of motor skill acquisition are the same for all children, each child develops at his or her own pace. Motor skill development is closely tied to the **number and quality of motor experiences** children are able to have. It is therefore crucial to give children an "active start in life" through **play** and a **wide range of activities.**

It is commonly believed that young children are naturally active. However, our way of life often results in children spending time in environments that are more conducive to sedentary pursuits.

### **Because, from early childhood on, youth today are less physically active**

Children find themselves in a number of environments (daycare, after-school program, school, day camp, etc.) in which they spend an increasing amount of time with various facilitators. This new reality demonstrates the importance of the resources provided to children, how they are structured, and the messages and values they convey.

### HOW TO CHANGE THE SITUATION?

All stakeholders must ensure that today's children have a variety of opportunities to move, explore and gain proficiency. It is equally important that children be guided by qualified staff who recognize the value of play and daily physical activity, and who are committed to putting conditions in place allowing young people and their families to access quality services that meet their needs.

We need to make changes to young people's living environments so they can develop motor skills that will allow them to stay active all their lives.



## EXAMPLES OF ACTIONS

### DAYCARES AND CHILDCARE SETTINGS, SCHOOLS AND AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS, COMMUNITY GROUPS AND ASSOCIATIONS

- Incorporate physical activity into regular schedules and programs offering a variety of motor experiences (running, climbing, sliding, jumping, throwing, dancing) in appropriate contexts (**free play**, body awareness activities, recess, after-school activities, physical education classes, active transportation, active breaks, physical challenges and active homework, etc.).
- Provide **child-size equipment** that is appealing and adapted to the child's development stage. The use of this type of equipment (balls, skipping ropes, etc.) is a very effective way to get children moving.
- **Play outside** as often as possible. Outdoor settings are often less restrictive and structured and more diverse than indoor settings, allowing children to more easily explore their motor skills.
- **Avoid early specialization** by allowing children to try out a wide range of sports and activities (see *Les saisons du primaire*, by the Réseau du sport étudiant du Québec).
- Offer a variety of activities that include challenges and **opportunities for all to excel** according to their ability and skills.
- Provide **facilitators with training** so they can offer kids better and more opportunities to be active.
- Get **parents** involved so they can encourage their children to continue their activities at home.
- Recognize and emphasize the importance of movement and play in children's development.

### MUNICIPALITIES

- Develop indoor and outdoor play areas that are stimulating, safe and accessible.
- Establish agreements among organizations to maximize use of available equipment and facilities in the community.

*Children should feel they are able to practice the physical activities and sports of their choice. It is through stimulating experiences that are adapted to their individual abilities and preferences, and are also associated with fun and play, that children will feel a sense of personal achievement, both now and in the future.*

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