

# Helping Your Child to Learn and Grow in the Early Years: Physical Development

## A Guide for Parents

### What Is Physical Development?

Physical development has two aspects – ‘Moving and handling’ and ‘Health and self-care’. It underpins children’s development in all other areas – for example by strengthening their hand and finger movements, children can then hold a pencil effectively and learn to write. Here are some ideas for supporting your child in this area.

<p><b>Get active as a family!</b> Walking, bike riding, swimming, kicking a ball, going to the playground – all great activities for helping your child’s physical development.</p>	<p><b>Use Playdough!</b> It is great for developing hand and finger muscles and coordination. Try putting on some music and having a ‘Dough Disco’. Prod, squeeze, pinch, poke and squash the dough in time to the beat. Use these words as you do the action. There is a recipe below for home-made playdough.</p>	<p>In a busy place, <b>talk about how we need to move safely</b> to avoid bumping into people. In a confined area, talk about how we need to move with smaller actions when there is less space.</p>
<p><b>If your child is left-handed,</b> make sure you have a pair of left-handed scissors for them to use. Although your child’s teacher will be looking out for a dominant hand, it may be worth letting the school know if you are sure your child is left-handed. Many children have not yet decided at this stage, so don’t worry if your child still uses both from time to time!</p>	<p><b>Moving and Handling</b></p> <p>Early Learning Goal – Children show good control and co-ordination in large and small movements. They move confidently in a range of ways, safely negotiating space. They handle equipment and tools effectively, including pencils for writing.</p>	<p><b>Set up an obstacle course</b> in the house or garden and ask your child to negotiate it in different ways. Something as simple as a few sofa cushions, a couple of chairs in a row and a blanket to crawl under, ‘commando-style’! Challenge them – ‘Can you move across the room without touching the floor/only on your hands and knees?’</p>
<p><b>Don’t be afraid to give your child simple tools to use,</b> such as scissors and blunt knives, under your supervision. Teach your child to use a knife and fork correctly.</p>	<p><b>Get in the kitchen and bake.</b> Beating, stirring, rolling out, using cutters, decorating cakes or cookies – all great for physical skills.</p>	<p><b>Bead threading,</b> construction toys and colouring activities are all great for developing hand and finger strength.</p>

<p><b>Toilet time.</b> As soon as you feel appropriate, teach your child to go to the toilet independently, including adjusting clothing so it doesn't get splashed, wiping correctly and thoroughly, flushing properly and washing hands.</p>	<p><b>Hands off!</b> Resist the temptation to 'do everything' for your child. A child who is able to dress and undress and go to the toilet independently is likely to be more settled and confident at school.</p>	<p><b>Involve your child in the family's food choices.</b> Talk about food that is healthy and food that should be regarded as a treat. Cut out pictures from magazines of different foods and sort them into groups.</p>
<p><b>Teach dressing and undressing.</b> Start with one garment at a time and practise with that. Choose clothes which don't have lots of tiny buttons or fasteners, and which have loose, comfortable necks and sleeves. If your child struggles with dressing, try leaving them one small step to complete, such as pulling up a zipper, to build their confidence.</p>	<p><b>Health and Self-Care</b></p> <p>Early Learning Goal - Children know the importance for good health of physical exercise and a healthy diet, and talk about ways to keep healthy and safe. They manage their own basic hygiene and personal needs successfully, including dressing and going to the toilet independently.</p>	<p><b>Let's talk!</b> Talk about how we keep ourselves healthy. Discuss why we use sun cream, why we sometimes need to take medicine, and teach your child good handwashing skills to protect them from all the bugs they will meet at school.</p>
<p><b>Talk about how exercise makes us feel.</b> Can your child notice that their heart is beating faster, that they feel warm or are breathing faster than usual?</p>	<p><b>Do active things as a family.</b> For example a walk, bike ride or trip to the swimming pool. Talk about how keeping active keeps us healthy.</p>	<p><b>Zzzz...</b> Make sure your child gets plenty of sleep and talk to them about why this is important. Keep a good bedtime routine going, including 'wind-down' time.</p>
<p>Find resources and activity ideas for keeping your child fit and healthy <a href="#">here</a>.</p>		

If you have any concerns about your child's physical development or self-care skills, speak to their class teacher or your GP.