

Physical Growth and Development of Young Children

All children between ages 4 to 5 have considerable changes in physical development. They acquire motor skills at different rates; therefore, make decisions about what, when, and how to teach physical education based on individual appropriateness instead of on age appropriateness. For children with special needs, determine what adaptations may be required for the environment, curriculum and instructional practices. Stages of development shown below are from Carol Copple & Bredekamp, 2006.

What 4-year-olds can do:

- Large muscles skills are expanding and becoming more refined.
- Skipping & hopping may appear.
- They ride tricycles.
- They can bounce & catch a ball, jump over a low obstacle, and balance on one foot.
- Small muscles gain coordination. They can use scissors, glue, and paintbrushes.
- They can use a fork to feed themselves and can dress and undress independently.
- Their memories may be closely associated with physical action.
- Hearing is still developing as is their ability to articulate certain sounds physically.
- Typically farsighted, close work and detail can be visually tiring.

What Teachers of 4-year-olds can do:

- Allow many opportunities to use large muscles, i.e., running, jumping, climbing, dancing, obstacle courses, and large hollow blocks. Children in wheel chairs can still do many of these activities, if adaptations are planned, such as having the class run in slow motion with the child with special needs.
- Demonstrate new physical skills and provide needed assistance for them to try out new skills.
- Let children cut & draw what they choose rather than following lines on a worksheet. Provide time to cut, paste, paint, thread, pour, mold, button, zip, tie, do finger plays.
- Give children room to manage self-help skills themselves.
- Provide skill development in stages for sensorimotor skills of catching, throwing, and other movements.
- Give special materials or equipment, if necessary, for some children and break up an activity into smaller steps.
- Plan the room or outside environment to support children with special needs, i.e., space for wheelchairs to maneuver, toys and materials available for children to reach at their level, surfaces for all children to position themselves (blocks on a table, for example).
- Pair children with others of varying abilities to model and motivate, but do not compare one child with another according to their capabilities.
- Assess children's physical development through observation and note taking.

What 5-year-olds can do:

- They can skip, walk backwards quickly, balance securely on a two-inch beam, jump down several steps, hop confidently, and usually have developed mature throwing and catching skills.
- They become more interested in fine motor skills, which are becoming more refined, i.e., cutting, pasting, drawing.
- Their handedness is fairly obvious.
- They can help with food preparation and setup and can largely dress themselves. Shoe tying may appear by age 6.
- They involve themselves in parallel play (side-by-side with another child) so their knowledge of their physical space is being refined.
- Growth spurts can cause unstable motor patterns and awkwardness.
- Their memories continue to be closely associated with physical action.

What Teachers of 5-year-olds can do:

- In addition to ideas mentioned above, adapt catching games for varying ability levels by using bigger or smaller balls and different throwing styles.
- Practice hopping, skipping, and balance beam activities.
- include activities with cross-body movement.
- Offer many materials and processes for art (collage, watercolors, printing, sculpting, etc.).
- Offer both right- and left-handed scissors.
- Allow children to serve themselves at snack time, but offer help with shoe tying. Remind them to wash their hands after using the bathroom.
- Do not use games and activities that emphasize competition with others.
- Teach children to learn to move and learn through movement.
- Provide instruction on locomotion, manipulation, and stability skills.
- Choose games that allow all children to move rather than just the child who is "it."
- Call on an adaptive physical education instructor to give tips for including all children in movement activities.
- Provide 1 to 2 minute warm-up activities prior to movement instruction.

Resources for Physical Education

Copple, Carol & Sue Bredekamp. 2006. *Basics of Developmentally Appropriate Practice An Introduction for Teachers of Children 3 to 6*. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

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