

PHYSICAL LITERACY

"Physical literacy is the motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge, and understanding to value and take responsibility for engagement in physical activities for life."

- The International Physical Literacy Association, May 2014

Physical literacy is an essential part of every child's development.

The Elements of Physical Literacy

Motivation and Confidence (Affective)

Motivation and confidence refers to an individual's enthusiasm for, enjoyment of, and self-assurance in adopting physical activity as an integral part of life.

Physical Competence (Physical)

Physical competence refers to an individual's ability to develop movement skills and patterns and the capacity to experience a variety of movement intensities and durations. Enhanced physical competence enables an individual to participate in a wide range of physical activities and settings.

Knowledge and Understanding (Cognitive)

Knowledge and understanding includes the ability to identify and express the essential qualities that influence movement, understand the health benefits of an active lifestyle, and appreciate appropriate safety features associated with physical activity in a variety of settings and physical environments.

6 Simple Ways To Support Physical Literacy In Kids

Remember: the development of physical literacy is ongoing. It's important that parents ensure their children have access to a broad range of opportunities to nurture their development.

Here are some proactive suggestions for parents to foster physical literacy in their children:

- 1. Start with yourself.** Your child will watch and learn from what they see you do. Lead by example: show interest in your child's physical activities and be involved!
- 2. Encouragement, regardless of your child's rate of development, can go a long way in their physical literacy journey.** Just as with numeracy and literacy skills, your child's physical literacy skills development will occur at its own rate as their brain and muscles grow.
- 3. Expose children to a wide variety of physical activities,** from swimming to dance to gymnastics, martial arts to team sports and more. Sports offer a multitude of benefits for kids and help provide the physical activity they need to grow up healthy. Research has shown that sports can improve kids' self-esteem and reduce stress, anxiety and depression. And let's not forget that sports are just plain fun.
- 4. Be an advocate for quality physical education at your child's school.** Speak with their teachers about their plans for developing and encouraging physically literate students.
- 5. Create opportunities for active family fun.** Make family decisions that improve and develop physical literacy. For instance, decide to go for an evening walk together instead of turning on the TV or burying your heads in phones, tablets or video games.
- 6. Work on fundamental movement skills such as throwing, running, climbing, hopping, jumping, kicking, skipping and catching.** There are multiple websites and examples online to help your child develop these skills.

Physical literacy is the blueprint for an active lifestyle and ensures children have the best shot at a bright future. Here are just a few reasons why children need to be physically literate:

1. Reduced Risk of Obesity

1 in 4 children leaves primary school obese. You cannot counteract poor nutrition with exercise alone. However, children who are active from a young age have a significantly lower risk of developing weight problems. Childhood obesity can be prevented if kids participate in 30mins of vigorous physical activity every day. The goal should be to form healthy habits and make exercise a fun and satisfying part of life.

2. Spatial Awareness

Children who are physically literate have superior spatial awareness. This allows them to move through environments with confidence. When balance, coordination and agility are developed at an early age, posture, functionality and energy levels continue to improve into adolescence.

3. Academic Attainment

Physical activity is shown to have a positive impact on academic attainment. According to a US study, which increased activity levels for a group of children, 14.8% of students demonstrate improved focus after physical activity and 17% report feeling more alert and ready to learn.

4. Improved Confidence

Children who are physically literate have the confidence to explore new challenges and activities. This boldness also affects other areas of life, such as making friends, achieving academically and making decisions for the future. Multiple studies provide strong evidence to support a link between physical activity and behavior in school.

5. Love of Sports

Over the last decade, participation in sports has declined. Children are not developing the fundamental movement skills needed to excel at these activities. When children do not feel comfortable playing sports, they are unlikely to develop an interest in participating. If we help children become physically literate at a young age, we can inspire a new generation of kids to develop a love for sports that will positively influence their lives. It also gives more children the chance to develop sports specific skills and, potentially, go on to play at a professional level.

6. Increased Happiness

Increasing numbers of primary school children are suffering from stress and anxiety disorders. According to teachers, this is largely due to the mental and emotional pressures of standardized testing. The BBC says 82% of teachers believe children face tougher pressures now than they did 10 years ago. Physical activity is known to alleviate stress, aid sleep and relaxation and help youngsters cope with anxiety in a constructive, healthy manner.

8. Coordination and Response Time

Good coordination and fast responses are important for a number of reasons. Children who are physically literate use coordination skills to perform a broad range of activities and move around environments safely. These abilities make it easier to learn to drive, ride a bike, play an instrument or achieve any other number of complex goals.

9. A Sense of Freedom and Adventure

When a child is physically literate, they enjoy exploring the world around them and are happy to do so independently. They jump, skip, run, twist and roll without difficulty. Physically literate kids are always on the go. They want to play with other children and join in if they see kids playing sports, even if it isn't an activity they are practiced at. This sense of adventure is typical for the physically literate.

10. Memory and Cognitive Function

Physical activity has a direct impact on cognitive health and it can even improve memory recall. According to many studies, exercise stimulates chemicals that affect the function of brain cells, the growth of blood vessels and even the accumulation of grey matter. It is suggested that people who exercise regularly have a greater density of cells and matter in parts of the brain that regulate critical thinking.

Adapted from:

<https://sportforlife.ca/physical-literacy/>

<https://www.cbc.ca/parents/learning/view/6-simple-ways-to-support-physical-literacy-in-kids>

<https://www.amaven.co.uk/blog/10-benefits-of-physical-literacy-for-child-development>