




Good Beginnings

Early Child Development · Parenting Education · Learning and School Readiness Tips

the Buzz...

Have you ever seen your child playing and felt that he or she should be doing something “useful” instead? Many adults do not realize that play is the work of childhood. It is through play that young children learn about the world.

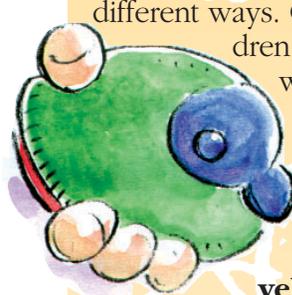
Play is valuable in many different ways. One way children learn to cope with their strong emotions is through play. Play is also good for helping children **develop thinking and problem-solving skills.**

Also, early play experiences with others can help young children develop needed social skills.

Through physical play children gain the strength, flexibility, and balance needed for **developing important motor skills.**

In this issue of *Good Beginnings*, we talk about why motor skills are important and we suggest ways for parents to encourage them.

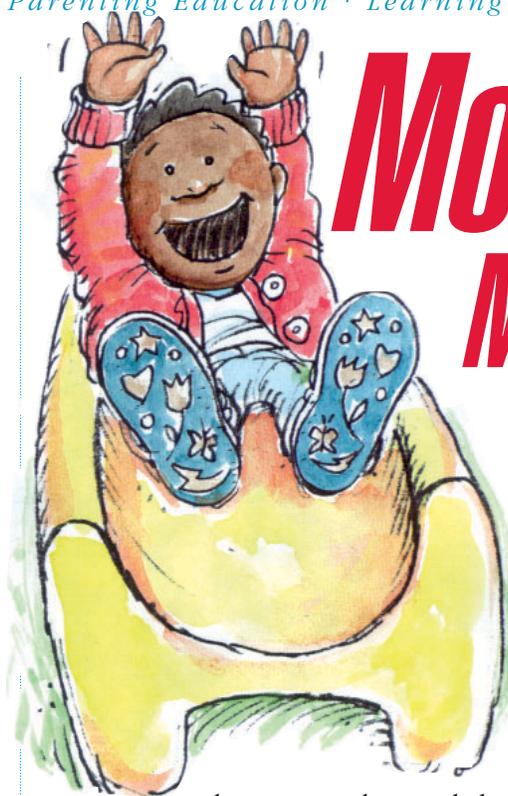
Children learn by doing. The importance of play is the opportunity it provides for children to do the work of growing emotionally, intellectually, socially, and physically.




Ellen Abell

Ellen Abell, *Editor*

Alabama Cooperative Extension System
Alabama A&M and Auburn Universities



Movement, Muscles, and Motor Skills

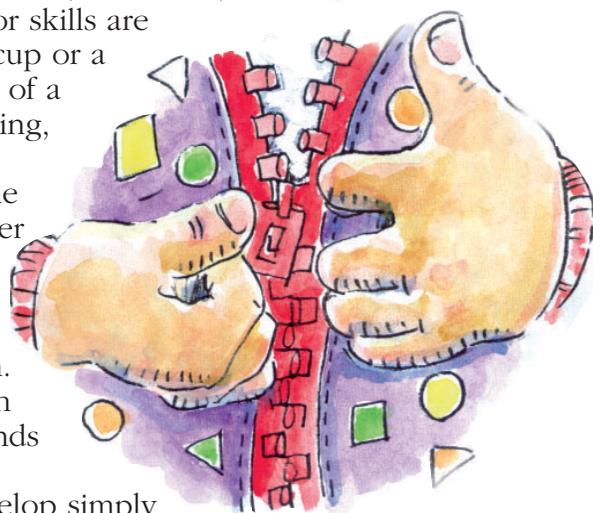
Motor skills are the physical abilities children develop that help them control the movements of their bodies. Children develop two kinds of motor skills—those that use their

large muscles and those that use their small muscles.

Examples of large motor skills are crawling, walking, climbing, and throwing. These skills depend on the development of the large muscles in the legs, back, shoulders, and arms.

Examples of small motor skills are holding things such as a cup or a crayon, turning the pages of a book, buttoning and zipping, and drawing or writing. These skills depend on the development of the smaller muscles in the wrists, hands, and fingers. Small muscle skills also depend on eye-hand coordination. This is the ability to match the movements of the hands with what the eyes see.

Motor skills do not develop simply because a child grows older. They develop only as much as the child has a chance to practice using her large and small muscles in daily activities. ●



Every Child is Different

Some children develop certain skills more slowly or more quickly than other children do. Reasons why children develop motor skills at different rates include differences in health, diet, size or temperament, and interest in or opportunities for physical play. ●

Wise Words

A wise person once said,
 “What I hear,
 I forget.
 What I see,
 I remember.
 What I do,
 I know.”



Children’s earliest learning is based on doing, on physically experiencing the world around them. What children do now—before they enter school—will be the basis of what they are able to learn later. ●

Motor Development and Self-Esteem

The importance of motor skills for your child goes well beyond her muscular development. Self-esteem is another benefit of a child’s confidence in her abilities to control her movements and muscles.

Children who feel confident in their physical abilities will enjoy taking part in activities with other children. A child who thinks he throws a ball awkwardly or runs slower than the other kids may avoid playing with other children. This results in fewer opportunities for him to enjoy the learning experiences that come from social play. This, in turn, may lessen his confidence in himself as someone who is a good playmate or friend.

Mastering physical skills has a good effect on many other areas of your child’s growth. For example, they are related to your child’s success in gaining independence and coping skills, in forming friendships, and in trying and learning new things. These skills will be an important part of your child’s success when she or he begins school. ●

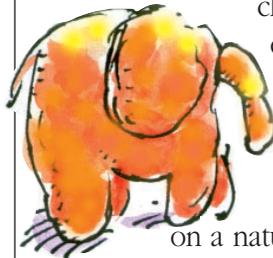


He Or She? We take turns referring to children as he or she. When we use he or she, we mean to include all children.

Encouraging Motor Skills

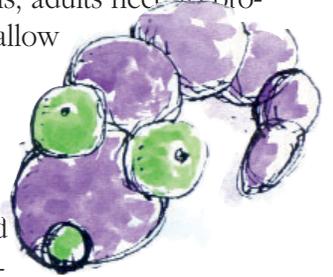


To develop their large motor skills, your children need plenty of physical exercise. Physical play is a very important part of their development. Young children, from infants to preschoolers, should have the chance to be physically active every day.



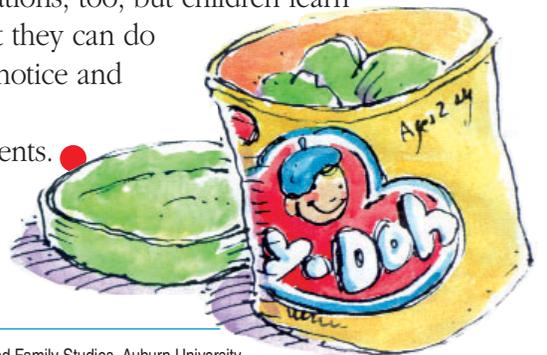
Besides encouraging outdoor play, arrange for children to visit a park or playground. Lead them on a nature walk and talk about the colors, textures, and shapes they see around them. Pretend to be different kinds of animals. Show each other how frogs hop, imitate kangaroos jumping, or act out how elephants might walk through the jungle.

To develop small muscle skills, adults need to provide activities for children that allow them to use different kinds of tools and materials. Using crayons, pencils, washable markers, child-safe scissors, paintbrushes, glue or paste, and clay gives children the opportunity to strengthen and better control their wrists,



hands, and fingers. Everyday tasks such as buttoning and zipping their clothing and feeding themselves with child-sized spoons and forks also build small muscles. It will take a little extra time to allow your child to attempt these tasks by herself, but the gains in self-control and self-esteem are well worth it.

As their skills improve, young children begin to take pride in their increasing physical abilities. There will be frustrations, too, but children learn to value what they can do when adults notice and praise their accomplishments. ●



4 Newsletter editor: **Ellen Abell**, *Extension Family and Child Development Specialist*, Associate Professor, Human Development and Family Studies, Auburn University. Special thanks to the artist, **Bruce Dupree**, *Extension Communications Specialist*. Contributor: **S. Jermaine Duffie**, Department of Human Development and Family Studies, Auburn University. www.aces.edu

References: National Association for the Education of Young Children (<http://www.naeyc.org/naeyc>). *The Developing Child: Understanding Children and Parenting*, 7th edition, by Holly E. Brisbane. New York: Glencoe/McGraw-Hill, 1997. *The Parents’ and Teachers’ Guide To Helping Young Children Learn: Creative Ideas from 35 Respected Experts*, edited by Better Farber. Cutchogue, NY: Preschool Publications, 1997.

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work in agriculture and home economics, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, and other related acts, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The Alabama Cooperative Extension System (Alabama A&M University and Auburn University) offers educational programs, materials, and equal opportunity employment to all people without regard to race, color, national origin, religion, sex, age, veteran status, or disability. UPS, 10M11, Revised March 2002, HE-804



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
 STATE HEADQUARTERS
 AUBURN UNIVERSITY, ALABAMA 36849-5662
 OFFICIAL BUSINESS
 PENALTY FOR PRIVATE USE

