



BUILDING A HEALTHY START

Professional Development for Caregivers of Infants and Toddlers

Module Two: Promoting Physical Activity for Infants and Toddlers in Early Childhood Settings

Alabama Department of Public Health

A Series of Six Best Practice Training Modules

Based on *Caring for Our Children:*

National Health and Safety Performance Standards;

Guidelines for Early Care and Education Programs,

Third Edition

Support for this project was provided by the Maternal and Child Health Bureau, Health Resources and Services Administration, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (Grant #H25MC00238)

Promoting Physical Activity for Infants and Toddlers in Early Childhood Settings

INTRODUCTION



Learning Outcomes

At the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- Acknowledge the importance of daily physical activity for infants and toddlers.
- Describe developmentally appropriate activities to promote infant growth and development.
- Give examples of appropriate indoor and outdoor physical activities for toddlers.
- Discuss the impact of screen time on infants and toddlers.

Pre-Test

Please complete the pre-test questions at this time.

Caring for Our Children

Caring For Our Children: National Health And Safety Performance Standards, Third Edition (CFOC3), are evidence-based and have expert consensus.

Available at www.nrckids.org

Caring for Our Children

National Health and Safety Performance Standards
Guidelines for Early Care and Education Programs

Third Edition



American Academy of Pediatrics
American Public Health Association
National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and Early Education

Standards, Guidelines, and Regulations

Standard: A statement that defines a goal of practice

- Based usually on scientific or epidemiological data
- Set as the strongest criterion for practice

Example: CFOC3

Guideline: A statement of advice or instruction

- Originates from an organization with acknowledged standing
- Developed often in response to a request or need

Example: “Choose My Plate” campaign

Regulation: A standard or guideline that becomes a requirement for legal operation

- Originates in an agency with governmental/official authority
- Accompanied by enforcement activity

Examples: *Minimum Standards*, Health Department food safety regulations

Terminology

Parent:

a parent, guardian, or other family member who provides care for the child

Caregiver:

an adult who provides out-of-home care for children (e.g., child care)

Regular Doctor:

a pediatrician, nurse practitioner, or other professional who provides medical and other healthcare services on a continual basis (medical home)

Importance of Physical Activity in Early Care

- Daily physical activity should be promoted from birth. Infants and toddlers learn through play, developing gross motor, socio-emotional, and cognitive skills.
- Participation in regular physical activity promotes gross motor development, improved fitness, cardiovascular health, healthy bone development, improved sleep, maintenance of healthy weight, and improved mood and sense of well-being.
- Encourage and support physical activity and movement throughout each day.

Promoting Physical Activity for Infants and Toddlers in Early Childhood Settings

PART 1 PHYSICAL ACTIVITY FOR INFANTS



Guidelines for Infants

Guideline 1: Infants interact with caregivers in daily physical activities that promote exploration of their environment.

Guideline 2: Infants are placed in safe settings that facilitate physical activity and do not restrict movement for prolonged periods of time.

Guideline 3: Physical activity should promote the development of movement skills.

Guideline 4: The environment meets or exceeds recommended safety standards for performing large muscle activities.

Guideline 5: Caregivers are aware of the importance of physical activity and facilitate the child's movement skills.

National Association for Sport & Physical Education

Benefits of Regular Physical Activity for Infants

Daily physical activity promotes:

- Large muscle development.
- Healthy bone development.
- Gross motor skills.
- Sense of individuality.



Characteristics of Infants

- Infants are fully dependent upon caregivers.
- They form attachments and need nurturing to be secure and to achieve optimal development in all domains. Nurturing includes attention to, communication about, and response to infant needs, including physical activity.
- Play activities allow infants to explore, stimulate their senses, and experience movement and action.



Characteristics of Infants. . .

Most infants:

- Enjoy playing one-on-one with caregivers.
- Enjoy physical activity, including movement and playing with objects.
- Are curious and explore the environment through physical activity.
- Move in new ways when challenged with interesting activities.



Examples of Infant Activity

Being active as an infant means:

- Moving and lifting the head.
- Kicking and reaching during tummy time.
- Reaching for or grasping toys or other objects.
- Playing or rolling on the floor.
- Crawling around the environment.



Infants Need to See New Sights and Explore the World

- Give each infant one-on-one attention.
- Provide time every day when each child is held, rocked, and carried to new environments.
- Play baby games, such as peek-a-boo, to stimulate communication and help infants realize that after people disappear, they can come back.
- Support verbal interaction through cooing and babbling.
- Encourage infants to continue exploratory efforts through smiles and applause for attempts at any new skills.

Physical Development of Infants

Physical development occurs inward (proximal), then outward (distal).

Infants develop proximal stability—stability in the shoulders, trunk, and hips—before they can control the movement of arms and legs (distal control).

Physical development proceeds from gross motor movements to fine motor skills.

Typical Movement Development During Infancy

Birth-2 Months

- Exhibits a rooting reflex.
- Raises head briefly and moves head from side to side.
- Makes quick and jerking arm movements.
- Brings hands to face.



Typical Movement Development During Infancy. . .

2-3 Months

- Strengthens shoulder muscles.
- Begins to hold head erect and steady.
- Holds chest up during tummy time with weight on the forearms. This milestone is the first coordinated action of muscle extensors and flexors working together to achieve a purposeful movement.
- Sits with support.
- Grasps and briefly holds objects.



Typical Movement Development During Infancy. . .

3-4 Months

- Brings hands to midline.
- Turns head side to side, holding head steady.
- Pushes down on legs when feet are placed on firm surface.



Typical Movement Development During Infancy. . .

4-6 Months

- Develops strong neck muscles and can lift head easily.
- Holds chest up during tummy time with weight on forearms.
- First, can roll over from front to back; and later, from back to front.
- Can briefly stand, with support.
- Can briefly sit, without support.
- Strengthens upper body movement.
- Brings feet to mouth.



Typical Movement Development During Infancy. . .

6-9 Months

- Continues to increase shoulder stability. Trunk and hip muscles develop, and overall stability improves.
- Begins to sit without support.
- Uses toes and hands to propel forward or in a circle; begins to crawl.
- Reaches with one hand and transfers objects from one hand to another.
- Grasps small objects with thumb and fingers.



Typical Movement Development During Infancy. . .

9-12 Months

- Continues to crawl.
- Can pull himself upright using support. Can briefly stand without support.
- Begins to walk with handholds and adult assistance. May briefly walk (2-3 steps) without assistance.
- 9-16 months, walks independently.



Infants Need to be Touched, to Wiggle, and to Move Their Body Parts

Provide the least restrictive environment that is safe and clean.

Early physical activities involve the adult moving the infant's body parts while talking and interacting. As infants develop, they will learn to do the motion as their caregivers say the words and model an action.

So Big

Help infants begin to associate words and movement.

- Sit on the floor facing the infant.
- Begin by raising your arms about your head as you say “So big.”
- Once you have the infant’s attention, hold onto the infant’s hands, raise his arms, and say “So big.”

A similar activity is to raise and lower the infant’s legs while saying “Up and down.”

Space and Safety

- Provide an uncluttered floor space of at least 5 X 7 feet. Play space should be out of the caregiver's walking path, away from shelving or objects that could fall, and away from rocking chairs or other potential hazards.
- Create an environment that is comfortable for caregivers to be on the floor level when interacting with infants.
- Provide lots of tummy time. Encourage the infant to play, roll, scoot, crawl, and move about actively several times during the day.
- Never leave an infant unattended.

When Awake, Let Infants Move Freely

- Do not use high chairs or other equipment that constrains movement for longer than 15 minutes, other than at meals or snack time.
- Use swings and bouncers only for short periods of time (less than 15 minutes).
- Use cribs for sleeping. Do not put infants in swings or car seats to sleep.



Infant Play Equipment

- Provide toys that are soft, large, and lightweight.
- Encourage the child to reach, grasp, and hold by providing blocks, stacking toys, nesting cups, textured balls, and squeeze toys.
- Prevent choking. Avoid toys with small parts, such as buttons that can be removed. Check fabric toys for tight seams; make sure stuffing cannot be pulled out.
- Prevent strangulation. Avoid toys with strings or cords.
- Do not put toys in or on cribs. CFOC3 recommends no mobiles on infant cribs. Cribs are for sleeping.

Physical Activities with Infants. . .

1-3 Months

Nurture the motor skill development of infants, especially head and trunk control, by:

- Giving lots of supervised tummy time! Interact with an awake infant on his tummy for short periods of time (3 to 5 minutes). Increase the amount of time as the infant shows enjoyment.
- Placing the infant on her tummy to practice lifting her head and kicking her legs.



Physical Activities with Infants

1-3 Months (continued)

Nurture the motor skill development of infants, especially head and trunk control, by:

- Placing the infant on his stomach across your legs while in a sitting position.
- Encouraging rolling over, body movement, and reaching. Place a brightly colored toy just out of reach.



Physical Activities with Infants. . .

3-6 Months

- As the infant gains strength and torso control, place him on your lap, facing you. Hold his hands and encourage him to stand. Gently pull him into a standing position. With your full support, gently sway him from side to side.
- Stimulate hand and foot play. Place the infant in a sitting position between your legs. Support the head and the elbows while bringing one arm forward to reach for the opposite foot.



Physical Activities with Infants. . .

3-6 Months (continued)

- While you are sitting, place the infant on her back with her feet on your chest. Bring her arms forward until the hands are together in front of the infant's eyes.
- Prop the infant in a sitting position and place his hands on a ball. Help child roll the ball forward.
- Model hand clapping while singing a catchy tune. Show the infant how to clap hands by holding his hands. Model hand clapping again and let the infant watch you and imitate.



Physical Activities with Infants. . .

6-9 Months

- Encourage the increasing coordination of physical movements as the infant reaches, grabs, and transfers things from one hand to the other.
- Encourage hand-eye coordination and developing fine motor skills as the infant begins to feed himself.



Physical Activities with Infants. . .

6-9 Months (continued)

- Allow the infant to explore freely on a clean, safe floor. Encourage creeping and crawling.
- Support the infant in an upright position to encourage balance and strength development.
- Move to music with the infant.



Physical Activities with Infants. . .

9-12 Months

Infants are much more mobile and need to explore. Provide as much opportunity as possible to walk and play. A safe environment is critical.

- Provide handholds for infants to pull themselves up. Promote balance development as they learn to walk.
- Do not use walkers!
- Allow the infant to walk barefoot indoors and develop his foot muscles.



Outdoor Activity for Infants

- Take infants outdoors each day, as weather permits. Outdoor play may be just 5-10 minutes each time. Infants should not be exposed to direct or reflected sunlight.
- Talk to infant about new sights and sounds, such as green grass and birds singing.
- Provide tummy time. Place a large clean sheet in a shady area on level ground free of rocks, sticks, or other objects. Watch for ants and other insects.



Incorporate Physical Activity into Daily Routines

- After naptime, move the infant's arms and legs before lifting the infant out of the crib.
- After diaper changes, encourage movement and grasping while washing the infant's hands.
- Encourage the infant to grasp the bottle during feeding.
- As infants learn to crawl and walk, encourage them to move toward you before picking them up.

Communicate with Parents

- Share information each day with parents about their child's emerging abilities (e.g., rolling over, first steps, grasping a toy).
- Encourage parents to support physical activity at home. Describe activities at child care.
- Discuss typical child development and share concerns, if any. Advise parents to consult their regular doctor with questions. Provide resource information as appropriate.

Promoting Physical Activity for Infants and Toddlers in Early Childhood Settings



PART 2

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY FOR TODDLERS

Guidelines For Toddlers

Guideline 1: Toddlers accumulate at least 30 minutes daily of structured physical activity.

Guideline 2: Toddlers engage daily in at least 60 minutes (up to several hours) of unstructured physical activity. Toddlers should not be sedentary for more than 60 minutes at a time.

Guideline 3 : Toddlers develop movement skills as building blocks for more complex movement tasks.

Guideline 4: Indoor and outdoor areas meet or exceed recommended safety standards for performing large muscle activities.

Guideline 5: Caregivers are aware of the importance of physical activity, and facilitate the child's movement skills.

National Association for Sport & Physical Education

Benefits of Regular Physical Activity for Toddlers

Regular physical activity promotes:

- Large muscle development, including strength and endurance.
- Cardiovascular endurance.
- Flexibility.
- Reduced risk of becoming overweight.
- Feelings of accomplishment and independence.
- Development of lifelong healthy habits.



Characteristics of Toddlers

- Toddlers are naturally active. They learn through movement and play.
- They are developing a sense of independence.
- Their curiosity, exploration, and mobility increases.
- Toddlers are self-centered, but begin to interact with other toddlers.



Physical Development of Toddlers

- The toddler's head and trunk size are large in proportion to the rest of the body. As the legs grow and muscles develop strength, the toddler is able to move faster and more easily.
- As vision and visual perception improve, toddlers develop skills to track moving objects.
- As their sense of balance and their own body positioning improve, toddlers enjoy climbing and balancing activities.
- Toddlers are not very skilled in maneuvering their bodies. They may bump into other children or objects.

Physical Development of Toddlers. . .

12-18 Months

- Walks with assistance, and begins to walk independently.
- Crawls up and down stairs.
- Develops fine motor skills. Stacks two objects, claps hands, and begins to use spoon.
- Likes to push, pull, carry, and dump things.



Physical Development of Toddlers. . .

18-24 Months

- Walks up and down stairs, walks on uneven surfaces, and stands on one foot—all with adult help.
- Runs reasonably well.
- Rolls hand-held wheeled toys with ease.
- Begins to dress self.
- Feeds self by using grasping and pinching skills.



Physical Development of Toddlers. . .

24-30 Months

- Rides four-wheeled toys with ease (no pedals).
- Runs with ease.
- Stands on tiptoe.
- Enjoys physical activities including running, climbing, jumping, and chasing.
- Opens doors by turning knobs and handles.



Physical Development of Toddlers. . .

30-36 Months

- Rides a tricycle and pedal toy.
- Has developed a hand preference.
- Continues to improve fine motor skills. Holds markers and crayons, uses paint and clay, and stacks toys with ease.



Provide Planned Physical Activity Each Day

- Toddlers have short bursts of energy and enjoy active play. A toddler may engage in vigorous play actively for 10 minutes, followed by a recovery period of quiet activity.
- Toddlers have short attention spans. Plan brief activities to include both structured and unstructured physical activity.
- Toddlers are mobile and eager to explore their environment. They like playing with objects and toys, and enjoy climbing and balance activities.
- Toddlers want to do things by themselves, but need repetition to learn new skills.

Learning Through Movement

Most toddlers enjoy:

- Engaging in any activity that includes movement.
- Climbing stairs and exploring the environment.
- Playing outside and discovering their world.
- Crawling, walking, dancing, swaying, jumping, and running.



Space and Safety

- Provide the least restrictive environment for active movement with at least 5 X 7 feet of space per child. Indoor play space should be out of the walking path and away from shelving or objects that could fall.
- Help children learn to negotiate environmental challenges through both indoor and outdoor play opportunities. Allow children to explore and experience age-appropriate obstacles, frustrations, and risks.
- Arrange colorful materials and equipment to support physical activity and learning. Spread out equipment and allow plenty of room for activities.

Equipment

Provide appropriate equipment and toys for play both indoors and outdoors. It is best to have two or more of each item because toddlers take what they want! Suggested equipment includes:

- Pedaled and non-pedaled riding and push toys.
- Large, soft balls and toys.
- Large blocks.
- Objects to safely climb up, jump down, and crawl through.
- Pretend play tools (digging tools, small brooms).
- Child-sized musical instruments.



Physical Activities for Toddlers

- Watch and play with toddlers to encourage movement and skill building.
- Choose activities that are appropriate for the toddler's age and skill level. As skills develop, vary these same activities to continue to challenge children.
- Be aware of and remove potential safety hazards.



Walk, March, and Jump

- Securely tape a hula hoop or use tape to mark out a large circle on the floor. Let children practice stepping and then jumping in and out of the circle. Count jumps out loud to integrate number recognition. Vary activity by placing 2-3 hoops so they touch each other.
- While playing music or singing, encourage children to stand with legs apart, knees bent, and rock left to right with the rhythm. Sway and dance to the music.

Toddler Parade

- Play lively music and have a toddler parade.
- Vary the activity by giving children small scarves to wave, hats to wear, or musical instruments to play.
- Practice walking, marching, and jumping.
- Pretend to be a train.
Encourage sounds and movements.
- Conduct parades both indoors and outdoors.



Obstacle Course

Set up a simple obstacle course, both indoors and outdoors. The course should encourage children to climb over, under, through, around, in, and out. Toddlers can:

- Crawl over large cushions.
- Crawl through tunnels made of sheets or large cardboard boxes.
- Step into and out of a hula hoop laid flat on the ground.
- Walk over squares of different surfaces such as grass, carpet squares, sand, and pea gravel.



Catch and Throw

- Sit across from the toddler with legs spread apart. Say “Here comes the ball” and roll a large ball toward the child. The child will trap the ball with his legs, arms, and chest. Encourage the child to roll the ball back to you. As skill develops, repeat with various sizes of balls.
- Roll old socks into balls and practice tossing the socks into a large laundry basket. Let children decide what distance they stand from the basket. Integrate color recognition by using various colored socks.

Water Splash

- Fill a small bucket with clean water and soak small sponges. Encourage children to throw the wet sponges at the side of a building or onto a flat surface.
- Watch the water splash and see the mark the water makes.

Move to Music

Sing songs that describe actions, such as:

- *Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes.*
- *Row, Row, Row Your Boat.*
- *Old MacDonald.*
- *Wheels on the Bus.*
- *If You're Happy and You Know It.*

As children develop skills, vary the action movements.

Move to Action Words

- Lead children in creative movement—sway like a tree, swim like a fish, and jump like a frog.
- Describe an animal that most children have seen. Ask children to show what that animal does.
- Read stories about animals. Act out the movements in the story.
- Let children move in their own ways!



Use Colorful Fun Materials

- Place a single object (e.g., teddy bear) in a different, yet visible, place each day. Help children look up, down, and all around to find the object each day.
- Vary the activity by placing several plastic apples or colorful balls around the classroom. Walk, crawl, and hop with the children to look for the missing objects.

Use Colorful Fun Materials. . .

- Blow bubbles upward and encourage children to watch, chase, and catch bubbles. If bubbles land on ground, encourage children to stomp on them.
- Vary the activity by dropping scarves or large feather.



Wheeled Toys

- Provide push and pull toys, such as toy lawn mowers and wagons.
- Encourage pretend play with toy brooms, rakes, and other household objects.
- Set up indoor courses for children to push and pull toy cars, trucks, and other wheeled toys.
- Provide four-wheel riding toys for toddlers to push and ride (no pedals). Create a large and level riding area.
- Add three- or four-wheel pedal toys for children aged 30 months and older.

Play Outdoors Daily

- Supervise children closely when going to and from the playground.
- Enclose area with fencing or other barriers.
- Provide large clear spaces for children to run, jump, and freely move around.
- Avoid overexposure to the sun. Schedule outdoor play during early morning or later in afternoon. Provide shade with large trees or canopies.
- Have drinking water available.



Outdoor Play

- While walking outdoors, point out and encourage children to stop and pick up leaves or other objects. Put the objects in a basket to explore later.
- Practice balance skills by walking on a wide wooden plank placed flat on the ground.
- Provide large soft balls to throw and kick.
- Offer sand and water play; provide containers for filling and pouring.



Applaud Efforts

- Smile, praise, and applaud all of the children's efforts.
- Vary activities so that each child has individual success.



Communicate with Parents

- Share information each day with parents about their child's emerging abilities (e.g., throwing, catching, jumping).
- Encourage parents to support physical activity at home. Describe their children's favorite activities at child care.
- Discuss typical child development and share concerns, if any. Advise parents to consult their regular doctor with questions. Provide resource information as appropriate

Physical Activity Adaptations for Children with Special Needs

Activities and equipment, including furniture, may be adapted to meet the developmental and physical needs of individual children.

These situations require individual planning prior to the child's entry into the program.

If observation of a child's physical activity indicates a concern about the child's development, encourage parents to consult the child's regular doctor. Provide information on resources and appropriate programs for further evaluation.

Avoid Screen Time in Early Childhood Settings

- Infants and toddlers learn best by interacting with adults and with other children – not screens.
- The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends avoiding television and other entertainment media for infants and children under age two years.
- Screen time includes computer games, game pads, and smart phones.
- Encourage parents to have “screen free” zones at home.



Promoting physical activity in early childhood forms the basis for a lifetime of active living!

Post-Test and Evaluation

Please complete the post-test questions and evaluation form at this time.

The training module team may follow up with you in two or three months to see how you used this information.

Thank You

Thank you for your participation in this training session.

Funding for this series of best practice training modules was provided by the Maternal and Child Health Bureau, Health Resources and Services Administration, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (Grant #H25MC00238).