

# Active Learning Opportunities

## Overview

Study after study shows that kids who get regular physical activity experience improvements not just in their fitness levels but in brain function, too. Just walking or biking to school or before beginning at-home school work can prime the brain for learning. It makes sense – kids need to move more. When they do, they are better positioned to succeed in the classroom and at home.



## Take Action

Incorporate physical activity all day, as well as into daily lesson plans and activities. Encourage children to walk and bike to school and back home. Ask the principal to host walking meetings with staff and children rather than meeting in an office setting. When posing questions or problems for children to discuss and solve, allow them to take a short walk or even just move in self-space. Set up movement stations or spaces in the classroom and at home with age- and space-appropriate equipment that children can use at designated times.

## At Home

Active learning is just as important at home as it is at school. Take frequent breaks from learning to move around. Schedule a family walk; parents and guardians need brain breaks, too! Plan a time every day to stop what you are doing and walk or bike for 30 minutes. Use the freedom of learning at home to offer alternative seating such as exercise balls or standing desks to promote active learning for children.

## Here are a few more ideas:

**Social Studies:** Discover and try out the games and dances of the countries or time periods being studied.

**Math and Science:** Integrate simple movement tasks such as jumping jacks, squats, and running in place into various math concepts (counting, equations, and graphs). Monitor children's heart rates before and after a short burst of exercise and predict heart rate responses for other forms of exercise. Create relay races that include math and science problems.

**Reading:** Ask kids to spell words using their body to mimic the shape of each letter. Read books that include physical action verbs such as wave, wiggle, jump, skip, shake and slither, and invite students to demonstrate the movements. Ask kids to act out a story after it's been read loud. This not only promotes physical activity, it but helps children summarize and demonstrate understanding. Or, assign children characters and re-read a story. Every time their character is mentioned in the story, ask children to perform a movement that is associated with the character.

**Spelling:** Write each letter of the alphabet on multiple sets of bean bags, and spread the bean bags throughout the classroom or home. Give each child a word to spell by finding the correct lettered bean bags to spell out the word.

**Gardens:** Gardening can provide opportunities for physical activity while learning about nutrition and agriculture education. Gardening requires children to carry items, bend and stretch, dig, rake, and weed. Create a child-led garden plan, incorporating skills on soil and water safety, safe food practices, record keeping of seeds and harvest items, and storage of garden equipment.

**Songs & Music:** Add motions to songs you already sing at home and in the classroom. Alternatively, find songs that children know and rewrite the words to incorporate physical activity. Stick to simple movements and minor changes for younger kids and let older kids impress you with their creativity!

See what they come up with!

All children need regular physical activity! It is particularly important for children with special needs to be included in activities that improve physical fitness. Variations and modifications of movements and activities should be offered to children to create a learning environment that is welcoming and respecting of all abilities. Adapted physical activities will ensure that children learn and achieve success at their own pace regardless of physical limitations or fitness level.

## Social Emotional Health Highlights

Activities such as these help students explore...

**Self-Awareness and Self-Management:** Incorporating active learning opportunities into your classroom and home allow children to identify and navigate feelings or emotions that are distracting or making it difficult to concentrate. Physical activity gets the body and brain moving, helping kids recognize the mind-body connection and the things they need to re-center and refocus.

### Tips



Build support and coordination of daily, school-wide physical activity opportunities by providing professional development and resources to help teachers get started in the classroom. Make it the new norm together!



Consider cross-curricular teaching and learning with your physical education teacher by aligning content themes and collaborating on lesson plans and projects. Ask the PE teacher to suggest a few safe, age-appropriate activities that connect to skills taught in physical

education class.

-  Develop a plan with your school health team, and seek feedback from the principal and teachers. Share simple ideas and lesson plans to introduce physical activity into the school day.
-  Participate in physical activities with your kids. Kids will be more likely to participate if they see you embracing the activity.
-  Engage volunteers by invite school health team members or parent volunteers to gather resources on adding movement to the classroom, asking parent volunteers to assist with tasks associated with school gardens, or hosting volunteers from a local plant nursery or horticulture group to assist with the school garden.
-  Invite parents to participate in active story-time to teach parents ways to be physically active with their kids, or invite older students to be physical activity leaders for younger students.
-  Let children create their own movements and corresponding
-  Make it fun! Consider playing music to appeal to your childrens' ages and interests.
-  Highlight how physical activity enhances learning and academic progress.
-  Use a [classroom physical activity tracker](#) to help your kids reach 10 minutes daily!
-  Involve volunteers from a local theater group to lead active stories and songs.

stories.

## Inclusion Tips

-  Empower children to suggest and choose which activities, games and movements they find enjoyable and accessible.
-  Get to know your children, and find out about their abilities, limitations, and interests. Encourage them to be a part of the learning and lesson-planning process.
-  Demonstrate modifications of simple movement skills such as jumping jacks, squats, and push-ups, and allow children to choose what's best. For example, show them a wall push-up, a kneeling push-up, and a full push-up.
-  Adapt the game or activity rules by reducing the number of players on a team, modifying the activity area, eliminating time limits, or lowering or enlarging targets or goals.
-  Provide a mixture of traditional versus non-traditional as well as competitive versus non-competitive activities.
-  Try creative or team-building games where success is only possible when the whole group works together.
-  Integrate various types and sizes of equipment such as tactile balls, juggling scarves, numbered spot markers, and foam noodles.

For more activities and ideas like this one, be sure to [sign up for our news and updates](#). And if you like what you see, please [donate to support our work](#) creating more ways to help build a healthier future for kids.

## Additional Resources

[Nutrition Education Movement Activities](#)  
([New York Road Runners](#))

[Dr. Jean offers hundreds of songs that relate to academic content, provide opportunities for movement and dancing, and are bilingual.](#)

[Tony Chestnut and Fun Times Action Songs](#)

[Stories in Motion \(Iowa Dept. of Education\)](#)

[Songs & Lyrics \(Color Me Healthy\)](#)

[BOKS at Home Resources \(BOKS\)](#)

[Fitness Card Deck- Fun for families to participate in together \(SHAPE America\)](#)

[Online Physical Education Network \(OPEN\) encourages movement at home through games and activity logs.](#)

[Movement in the Classroom Tip Sheet](#)  
([Action for Healthy Kids](#))

## Related Activities

### Classroom Physical Activity Breaks

Physical activity doesn't have to be in a recess or PE setting to be effective.

### Active Indoor Recess

Are your students restless from being cooped up inside due to rain or cold? Active indoor recess is a great way to get physically moving, regardless of space or equipment constraints.

### **Stepping Into the Wild: Creative Outdoor Learning**

Creating an outdoor classroom is a fun and imaginative way to engage students in learning about nature and the world around us.

### **Yoga for Children**

It's often assumed that one must already be flexible and physically fit to participate in yoga. One of the many great aspects of yoga is that it can be modified to fit the age, goals and abilities of almost anyone.