

# WORK OUT THE WIGGLES

JOIN THE PARADE  
**MARCH**



**TOSS CATCH  
KICK AND ROLL**



**REACH  
HIGH  
AND  
BEND  
LOW**

A BEST PRACTICE GUIDE TO

# ACTIVE PLAY

FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD

BALANCE  
ON ONE  
**FOOT**

**JUMP**

**HOP  
SKIP  
TWIRL**

**MOVE TO THE  
MUSIC**

SCHEDULE  
**TIME**  
TO MOVE

# STRETCH AND TWIST

GET SOME FRESH AIR

SPEND  
TIME

**OUTDOORS**

Winter Spring Summer Fall

**HOOP IT  
UP!**



HAVE SOME  
**FUN!**



## About This Guide

This guide is a companion to North Dakota's Early Learning Guidelines. Parents, families, and early care and education (ECE) providers play a key role in supporting the unique growth of each child.

This guide was created to provide practical ideas for including physical activity and offering healthy foods to children ages 2 to 5 years old. Information is based on current science, research, and national best practices.

### What are Early Learning Guidelines?

North Dakota's Early Learning Guidelines reflect what typically developing children need to know, understand, and do by the time they reach kindergarten.

### What is the Role of Active Play and Healthy Eating in Early Childhood?

Purposeful active play supports a child's gross motor development, a significant part of the Early Learning Guidelines. A child's eating habits are also related to many areas of development, including social and emotional, cognitive, language/communication, and health/physical development.

### A Useful Resource for All

Early childhood education providers, parents, and families can use this guide to:

- Incorporate physical activity into daily routines
- Use active play to support children's gross motor development
- Learn creative and positive ways to offer foods to children
- Consider adopting specific written physical activity and nutrition policies

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# Movement Fundamentals

Children learn fundamental movement skills between the ages of 2 to 5 years. These fundamental movement skills are typically divided into three categories:

- **Locomotor Skills** - Gross motor movements children use to move from place to place
- **Object Control Skills** - Gross motor movements needed to use objects in a controlled manner
- **Stability Skills** - Gross motor movements used to maintain balance while changing body positions

Because children should have these skills before entering kindergarten, it is important that early childhood education providers offer active play opportunities where children can use gross motor movements to master these fundamental movement skills.

## Benefits of Active Play

Toddlers and preschoolers are active learners who master skills best through movement and touch. Consistent, daily active play sets the stage for learning plus:

- Develops physical fitness
- Teaches fundamental movement skills
- Promotes cognitive learning and brain development
- Builds confidence
- Leads to interactions with the environment
- Prevents obesity and related diseases

## Brain Development

Movement positively impacts brain development by leading to the growth of brain cells and the connections between them. Encouraging movement for 2 to 5 year olds helps them build motor skills and supports brain growth.



### DID YOU KNOW

Physical activity and healthy eating habits that are formed early in life track into adulthood, making early childhood education environments the perfect place for children to learn healthy lifelong habits.



## Set the Stage for Success

Your commitment to implementing active play in your program will be more successful if you take these steps.

### Put it in Writing

Written physical activity policies communicate how important active play and intentional movement are to your program. Reference these policies in your parent handbook, contract, staff handbook, and newsletters to:

- Provide clear guidelines for active play in your program
- Educate families and staff on the importance of physical activity
- Encourage families to make sure children are dressed appropriately for active play and outdoor play in all weather

#### Information to include in your written policies:

- Benefits of physical activity and outdoor play
- The amount of time you will provide each day for physical activity/gross motor movement
- Limits on seated or sedentary time for children
- Clothing needed for indoor and outdoor active play (ie: close-toe shoes, winter clothing, etc)
- Practices that encourage physical activity (ie: plan, lead, and participate)
- Safety measures that will be taken (ie: sunscreen, temperatures for outdoor play in all weather)

#### Policy Tips

Watch for policy tips and examples throughout this guide.

## Follow Physical Activity Guidelines

	TODDLERS	PRESCHOOLERS
<b>Daily Physical Activity</b>	At least 60-90 minutes	At least 120 minutes
<b>Daily Structured Activity</b>	At least 30 minutes	At least 60 minutes
<b>Daily Unstructured Activity</b>	At least 30 minutes	At least 60 minutes
<b>Amount of Outdoor Play</b>	2 to 3 times/day for a daily total of 60 to 90 minutes	
<b>Sedentary Time</b> (when children are seated or still)	No more than 15 minutes at a time, except when eating or sleeping	
<b>Screen Time</b>	No screen time for 2-year-olds and younger	Less than 30 minutes per week for 2 to 5-year-olds

Source: *Caring for Our Children: National Health and Safety Performance Standards; Guidelines for Early Care and Education Programs, 3rd Edition*. Go NAP SACC: *Nutrition and Physical Activity Self-Assessment for Child Care, 2nd Edition*. *Let's Move! Child Care Checklist Quiz*



## Create Active-Friendly Environments

The set up of classrooms, play spaces, and outdoor environments influence children's behaviors, movements, and interactions. Keep these tips in mind as you set up your early childhood environments.

### Indoor Spaces:

- Provide clear traffic patterns by setting up furniture in certain ways or placing footprints or arrows on the floor to demonstrate where to walk.
- Choose developmentally appropriate materials for your space, including portable play equipment such as bean bags, juggling/activity scarves, and parachutes.
- Display posters of active families and keep books in reading area that show children dancing, moving, and playing.
- In homes, use hallways as “bowling alleys” or furniture as part of an obstacle course.

### Outdoor Spaces:

- Provide both portable and fixed active play materials, making sure there is enough portable play equipment for all children to use.
- Ensure access to plenty of natural materials, such as trees or gardens.
- Give children easy access to drinking water when playing outdoors.

## Lead the Way

Children need time for both structured and unstructured activities throughout their day. Best practices recommend that half of all physical activity should be structured.

### Tips for Leading Structured Physical Activity

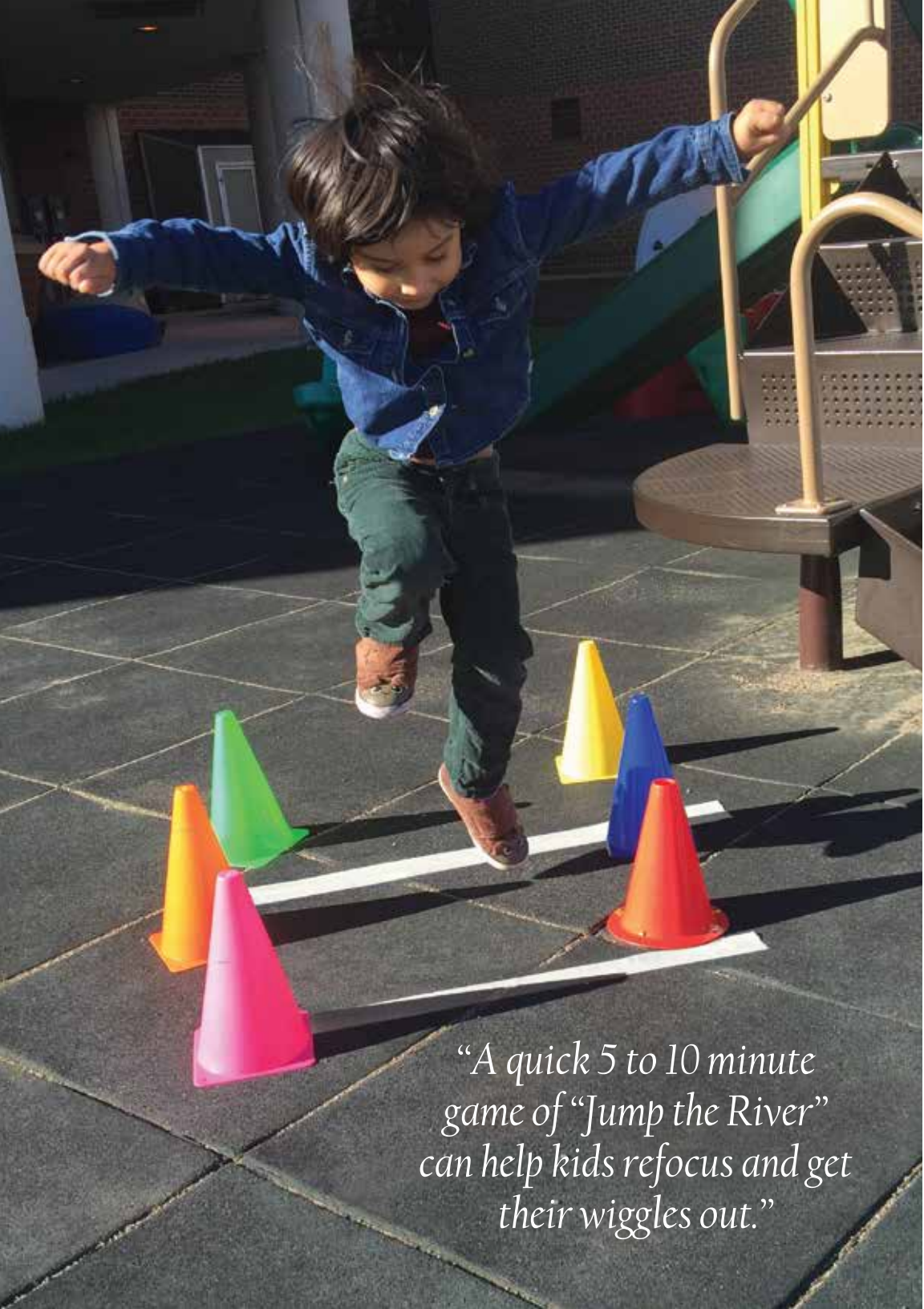
- Give brief, quick instructions (under 1 minute).
- Tell children about the activity, then show them what you want them to do.
- Establish boundaries and routines, especially for starting/stopping an activity or movement.
- Have a “cool-down” activity to help children transition out of active play.
- Vary the activity frequently to keep children engaged.



### Cue Movement with Music

Play music when you want children to start an activity and stop the music to freeze the action.

*“Structured activities help the more reluctant kids who usually hang back be more involved in active play.”*



*“A quick 5 to 10 minute game of “Jump the River” can help kids refocus and get their wiggles out.”*



# Locomotor Activities

Locomotor movements such as walking, running, jumping, hopping, galloping, skipping, and leaping help children travel from one place to another.

## WATCH FOR THESE LOCOMOTOR MILESTONES

2 to 3 years	3 to 4 years	4 to 5 years
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Walks across room</li> <li>• Uses a hurried walk</li> <li>• Walks backwards</li> <li>• Pushes a riding toy with feet</li> <li>• Marches around room</li> <li>• Walks up and down stairs alternating feet with help</li> <li>• Jumps in place, two feet together</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Runs</li> <li>• Avoids obstacles and people while moving</li> <li>• Climbs up and down on playground equipment</li> <li>• Rides tricycle using pedals</li> <li>• Gallops, but not smoothly</li> <li>• Jumps over objects or off a step</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Runs smoothly</li> <li>• Jumps and spins</li> <li>• Marches</li> <li>• Moves through obstacle course</li> <li>• Gallops and skips with ease</li> <li>• Plays "Follow the Leader" using a variety of traveling movements</li> <li>• Plays games that require jumping or kicking a ball</li> </ul>

Source: *Active Start: A statement of physical activity guidelines from birth to age 5, 2nd Ed (2009)*, [www.shapeamerica.org](http://www.shapeamerica.org), SHAPE America.

## Jump the River

**SUGGESTED AGES:** 3+

**GROSS MOTOR SKILLS:** Jumping

**REQUIRED MATERIALS:** Chalk for outdoors or masking tape for indoors

**SET UP:** Use chalk/tape to create parallel lines spaced the width that children can jump.

**HOW TO PLAY:** Have all the children stand behind one of the tape/chalk lines. Demonstrate how to jump across the "river". Cue the action by saying "jump".

**VARIATIONS:**

- Try jumping different ways - loudly, quietly, or like a frog.
- Incorporate counting by asking children to jump a certain number of times.
- Tell a story that explains why children are jumping across the river (i.e., to make it home, to get to their garden, etc.).



### *Movement Cue*

Demonstrate how to jump. Bend knees, extend arms behind you, swing arms forward as you jump, and land on both feet.



# Musical Hoops

**SUGGESTED AGES:** 4+

**GROSS MOTOR SKILLS:** Walking, hopping, jumping, galloping, skipping, and a variety of other locomotor skills

**REQUIRED MATERIALS:** Upbeat music and one hula hoop per child

**HOW TO PLAY:** Start the music and have the children walk around in a circle. When the music stops, children must freeze with at least one body part inside the hoop. Remove one hoop each time you stop/start the music. Encourage children to share space in remaining hoops.

**VARIATIONS:** Practice body-part recognition by asking children to place a specific body part in the hoop when the music stops.



## *Write Inclusion Into Your Policies*

Most active play can be adapted to include children of mixed ages and physical abilities.

- Provide appropriate help to children with special needs during active play. Encourage them to do what they can independently.
- Work with a child's specialists and parents when adapting physical activity.
- Modify traditional "elimination" games (like musical chairs or dodge ball) so every child has a chance to be active for the entire play time instead of being eliminated early and being inactive.
- Join children in physical activity whenever possible and encourage positive interactions among children of all ages so they can learn from one another.
- Ensure infants have a safe space for tummy time and exploring their environment.





# Join the Parade

**SUGGESTED AGES:** 2+

**GROSS MOTOR SKILLS:**

Walking, marching, and jumping

**OPTIONAL MATERIALS:**

Upbeat music, cones, floor spots, or carpet squares

**SET-UP:**

Large Space: Arrange children and/or cones so they can move in a circle during parade.

Small Space: Arrange children so they can swing their arms while they move in one spot during their parade.

**HOW TO PLAY:**

Invite children to join you in a pretend parade. Ask children to imagine all the things you might see in a parade: cars, marching band, fire trucks, horses, etc. Take turns pretending to be one of these characters in a parade. Change the movement frequently. Start with walking, progress to marching, then to jumping.

**VARIATIONS:**

- Encourage older children to help the younger ones move around the circle.
- Model how to lead a parade and let children take turns in front of the group.
- Use music to cue different actions such as “start and stop”, “jump like a rabbit”, or “walk around the cones.”



## DID YOU KNOW

Learning how to march prepares children for the more challenging skills of leaping and skipping.



## Marching Cue

Call out cues such as “lift your knees high... swing your arms... bend your knees... land on the balls of your feet.”





### **DID YOU KNOW**

Object control activities strengthen math and cognitive skills by providing children with opportunities to experience cause and effect as they estimate distance (near/far), height (over/under), and speed (fast/slow).



# Object Control Activities

Movements such as throwing, catching, kicking, striking, and rolling help children learn how to move objects in a controlled way.

## WATCH FOR THESE OBJECT CONTROL MILESTONES

2 to 3 years	3 to 4 years	4 to 5 years
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Carries a large ball while moving</li> <li>• Flings a beanbag</li> <li>• Throws a ball or other object by pushing it with both hands</li> <li>• Catches a large, bounced ball against the body with arms straight</li> <li>• Kicks a stationary ball</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Throws a ball or other object</li> <li>• Traps thrown ball against body (bending arms when catching)</li> <li>• Strikes a balloon or other object with a large paddle</li> <li>• Kicks ball forward by stepping or running up to it</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Steps forward to throw a ball</li> <li>• Catches a thrown ball with both hands</li> <li>• Dribbles a ball</li> <li>• Strikes a stationary ball</li> <li>• Bounces and catches a ball</li> <li>• Kicks moving ball while running</li> </ul>

Source: Active Start: A statement of physical activity guidelines from birth to age 5, 2nd Ed (2009), [www.shapeamerica.org](http://www.shapeamerica.org), SHAPE America.

## Target Practice: Striking

**SUGGESTED AGES:** 4+

**GROSS MOTOR SKILLS:** Striking, twisting

**REQUIRED MATERIALS:** Foam pool noodle cut to size that is easy for child to handle (or rolled up/taped newspaper), something small, soft, and round to hit (rolled socks, small playground ball, soft fleece ball)

**SUGGESTED MATERIALS:** Large paper to make a target, cone, floor spot

**SET UP:** If using, spread out cones or floor spots so each child has a place to strike without interfering with each other.

**HOW TO PLAY:** Instruct children to hold the noodle with two hands and hit the ball towards the target. If using a cone, prop the ball on top of the cone. If not using a cone, have children bend over and hit the ball on the ground like a hockey shot.

**VARIATIONS:**

- If outdoors, use hula hoops laid down on the ground to form a target. Have one target per child or use several and have all children aim at different hoops.
- If outdoors, encourage children to take hard strikes and soft strikes, noticing how far and fast the ball moves with each motion.



## *Highlight the Benefits of Movement In Your Policies*

Movement helps young children build their motor skills and leads to the growth of brain cells and the connections between them.

## Toss & Catch

**SUGGESTED AGES:** 2+

**GROSS MOTOR SKILLS:** Throwing and catching

**REQUIRED MATERIALS:** Juggling/activity scarves for each child

**HOW TO PLAY:** Toss one scarf straight over head and try to catch it without moving from your spot.

**VARIATIONS:**

- Drop the scarf and try to catch it before it hits the ground.
- Catch the scarf using different body parts.
- Tell a story - Pretend your scarf is a frog who is jumping out of your hands and you need to catch it before it hits the ground.



### *Cross the Line*

Cue children to “reach across” their body to catch the scarf. This “crossing the midline” action encourages brain development.



### **DID YOU KNOW**

Crossing the midline - when a child uses one part of the body to cross over to the other side of the body - builds pathways in the brain that help with coordination of motor and cognitive skills by requiring both sides of the brain to communicate.



## Ball Rolling

**SUGGESTED AGES:** 2+

**GROSS MOTOR SKILLS:** Rolling, catching, bending, and reaching

**REQUIRED MATERIALS:** One ball for every two children

**HOW TO PLAY:** Children roll a ball back and forth in a variety of ways. Progress through methods below as children show readiness.

- **Straddle Sit Roll:** Children face each other in a straddle position (v-sit) and roll the ball by pushing it.
- **Kneeling Roll:** Children sit on both knees facing their partners and roll the ball by pushing it.
- **Standing Two-Hand Roll:** Children stand in a straddle position, hold the ball in both hands, swing the ball between their legs, and roll the ball towards their partner.
- **Standing One-Hand Roll:** Children stand with feet shoulder-width apart, hold the ball with one hand, swing their arm towards the ground, and release the ball towards partner. Receiving partner should squat down to catch the ball.



### *Give It Purpose*

Use a target to give a purpose to the activity, but don't put too much emphasis on accuracy.

Focus instead on how their skills progress.



## Throwing & Kicking

**SUGGESTED AGES:** 3+

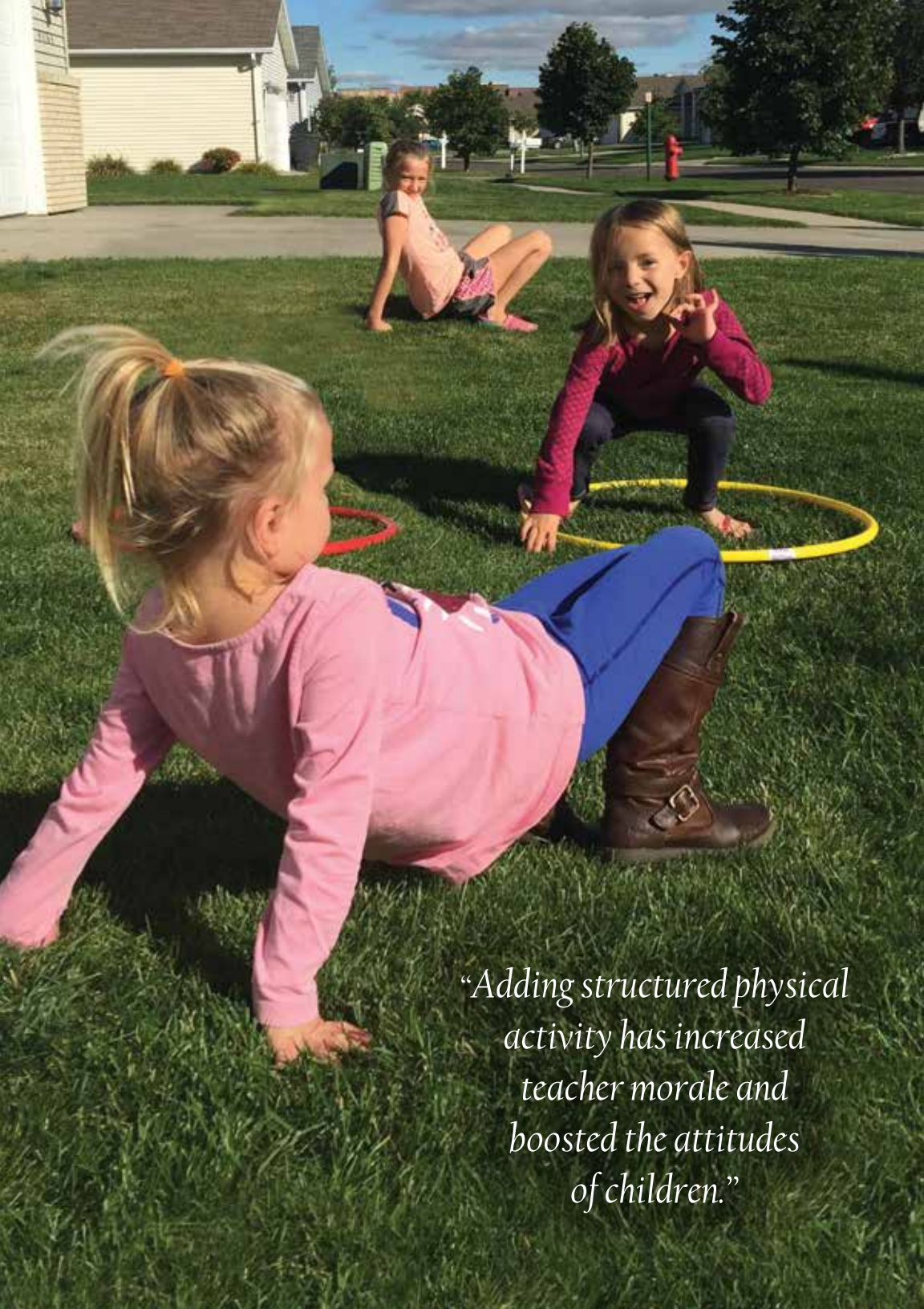
**GROSS MOTOR SKILLS:** Throwing and kicking

**REQUIRED MATERIALS:** Something soft and round (rolled socks, fleece ball, or soft playground ball)

**HOW TO PLAY:** Have children throw or kick the ball towards a target on the wall or floor. After each throw, encourage them to pick it up and try again. As their skills and confidence grow, have them move farther back or ask them to throw/kick it harder or softer.

**VARIATIONS:**

- Instruct children to alternate between an underarm and overarm throw.
- Turn this kicking/throwing game into a game of bowling by setting up plastic water bottles or cones as the target.



*“Adding structured physical activity has increased teacher morale and boosted the attitudes of children.”*



# Stability Activities

Gross motor movements such as reaching, turning, bending, stretching, and twisting help children develop their ability to maintain balance while changing body position.

## WATCH FOR THESE STABILITY MILESTONES

2 to 3 years	3 to 4 years	4 to 5 years
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Squats to pick up toys</li> <li>• Stands on tiptoes to reach something</li> <li>• Gets in and out of adult chair</li> <li>• Kneels while playing</li> <li>• Straddles a taped line on the floor</li> <li>• Sidesteps across beam or sandbox edge</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Walks forward along sandbox edge, watching feet</li> <li>• Jumps off low step, landing on two feet</li> <li>• Jumps over small objects</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hops across the playground on one foot and then the other</li> <li>• Walks across beam or sandbox edge, forward and backward</li> <li>• Attempts to jump rope</li> <li>• Hops, skips or twirls around and stops without falling</li> </ul>

Source: *Active Start: A statement of physical activity guidelines from birth to age 5, 2nd Ed (2009)*, [www.shapeamerica.org](http://www.shapeamerica.org), SHAPE America.

## Crab Walk at the Beach

**SUGGESTED AGES:** 3+

**GROSS MOTOR SKILLS:** Balance, stretching, twisting, locomotor movement

**REQUIRED MATERIALS:** One hula hoop, floor spot, or carpet square per child

**OPTIONAL MATERIALS:** Cones or other items to define activity area

**HOW TO PLAY:** Have each child sit on one spot. This spot will be their “crab home.” At your signal, instruct children to crab walk within the activity area. When you yell out “seagull!” children must crab walk back to their home (hoop or floor spot), where they will be safe from the seagull. A great activity for indoor or outdoor play.

**VARIATIONS:** Encourage children to add other “at the beach” actions to the story such as wave hello to a crab friend, put on sunscreen, shake out beach towel, stomp their feet, or dig for sea shells.



### Combine Stories and Activities

Tell a story about crabs going to the beach. Call out “SEAGULL” occasionally as you tell the story.



## Balance at the Circus

**SUGGESTED AGES:** 3+

**GROSS MOTOR SKILLS:** Balance, bending, and stretching

**OPTIONAL MATERIALS:** Music, floor spot, or carpet squares

**HOW TO PLAY:** Invite children to perform in front of a big audience at a pretend circus. Lead children by saying I can balance on:

- One foot
- Hands and knees
- Fingers and knees
- Knees (no feet touching)
- Tummy (no hands or feet)
- Bottom (no hands or feet)

**VARIATIONS:** Use a taped line on the floor, a jump rope, or the edge of a rug as the “tight rope”. Encourage children to be circus performers who can keep their balance as they walk high above the crowd. Have them wave to the crowd and thank them for coming to the circus as they perform their tricks.

*“Going outside and getting more fresh air helps my children take better naps and feel more energetic.”*

### *Make a Commitment to Movement in Your Policies*

- Children will not be seated for periods of more than 15 minutes outside of meals or nap time.
- Our program will provide at least 120 minutes of active play to all preschool children who are enrolled full-time.
- We do not withhold active playtime for periods of longer than 5 minutes for children with challenging behaviors.





## Hoop It Up

**SUGGESTED AGES:** 2+

**GROSS MOTOR SKILLS:** Bending, stretching, twisting, and body awareness

**REQUIRED MATERIALS:** Hula hoop

**HOW TO PLAY:** Use hula hoops to:

- Do the limbo
- Define your “space”
- Thread the hula hoop over or around you, crawl through it, or roll it on it’s edge

## Stretching and Bending

**SUGGESTED AGES:** 2+

**GROSS MOTOR SKILLS:** Twisting, bending, stretching, body awareness

**MATERIALS:** Calming music, activity spots, or carpet squares.

**HOW TO PLAY:** Cue children to try a variety of movements:

- Reach up to pull an apple from a tree
- Flop over like a rag doll
- Stretch to climb up a mountain
- Bend over to pull carrots
- Form a letter with arms and legs
- Do a yoga-style pose of a tree or a dog

*“Yoga helps children understand their emotions and use their body in different ways.”*



### DID YOU KNOW

Stability activities help children build endurance for being still.



