

12 Physical Activities for Toddlers and Pre-schoolers

Activity Ideas

Toddlers are naturally active and generally are walking, running, kicking, and throwing, so it's vital to provide them with plenty of opportunities to learn and hone these motor skills while using that natural energy.

Activities should use gross motor skills, which means using their major muscles in body parts like their legs and arms to do things like run, jump, spin, and climb. Toddlers are just beginning to learn these movements, so give children plenty of practice with them through physical activities and games.

If you need ideas for physical development activities for toddlers in your care to get them moving, here are a few indoor games to play with toddlers:

1. Row, Row, Row Your Boat

This indoor physical activity is great for toddlers' physical development and socialization with no equipment necessary. In this exercise, children sit facing a partner with feet touching. They hold hands and lean forward and backward while singing the classic, "Row, Row, Row Your Boat."

2. Musical Hide and Seek

Play music from a phone and hide it from the children. You and the children can then search together to figure out where the music is coming from. This will be fun for the kids and will get them moving.

3. Build a Tower

For this activity, you'll need a supply of blocks, containers with lids, or another similar, stackable object. Using your item of choice, build a tower with a child. Take turns adding blocks or containers to the tower and see how high the child can stack them. You can count the number of stacked items together, and then when the tower is complete, the child can knock it down.

4. Toss Balls in a Basket

Give toddlers foam or rubber balls to roll back and forth to a partner. Older toddlers can toss the balls into a basket. During this activity, exercise caution with younger children who might bite foam balls. Avoid small balls that toddlers could put in their mouths and swallow.

5. Throw Sponges

This activity is great for a hot day. Children take wet sponges and toss them toward a container or bin. They can compare how far sponges of different sizes can be thrown or how different amounts of water affect the distance the sponge travels.

6. Imitate Animals

While on their hands and knees, toddlers move, stretch, and play like animals. They can hop like a frog or waddle like a penguin. They can arch their backs, roll on their backs, reach as high as they can, and walk on all fours. Choose a variety of animals and movements to keep children engaged and using their whole bodies to stay active.

7. Traffic Safety

Cut three circles from coloured paper — one red, one yellow and one green. Label the red circle “Stop,” the yellow circle “Slow,” and the green circle “Go.” One child is chosen to be the traffic light, and they will hold up the green circle, the yellow circle and the red circle in turn.

The other children move forward when “Go” is held up, slow down when “Slow” is held up and freeze when “Stop” is held up. Take advantage of this fun activity to also teach children about traffic safety.

8. Snake Dance

For this activity, children form a line to make a snake. They place their hands on the shoulders of the child in front of them, and the first child or the teacher leads them around the room or play area.

To make things a bit more exciting and challenging, the child at the front of the line can try to tag the child at the end. This will get everyone moving faster!

9. Catching Feathers



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Take feathers and toss them into the air for children to catch with their hands or in containers before they reach the ground. This will get toddlers moving and having fun!

If children are old enough, they can also each be given a feather and try to keep the feather in the air by blowing on it.

10. Follow the Leader

Stand in front of the children and tell them to watch you carefully and copy your moves. Touch your nose, hop on both feet, stomp in a circle, or crawl on all fours. Choose simple actions and use large motor activities.

11. Hit the Balloon

Encourage toddlers to keep a balloon from touching the ground by hitting it with their hands. You can also place an item between two children, such as a chair or pillow, and instruct them to hit the balloon over the barrier to the other child. Chasing balloons allows children to run, zigzag, and hop to keep up with the object while maintaining their balance.

12. Feed the Lion

On a cardboard box, draw or paint a lion's head and cut a hole for the lion's mouth. Children will take crumpled balls of paper and try to toss them into the lion's mouth. Afterward, children can count how many balls they fed the lion.

These games and activities will keep your toddlers engaged and having fun while being active!

Best Practices & Activities for Pre-schoolers

Pre-schoolers should be active for two hours or more each day. As with toddlers, it's best to incorporate both indoor and outdoor playtime, along with structured and unstructured activities.

Activities led by adults should be planned ahead of time and engaging for pre-schoolers. Similar to playtime for toddlers, structured activities should be vigorous, inclusive of all children, developmentally appropriate, and support the development of children's motor skills. Activities should keep every child moving for the duration of the activity, and games that eliminate children from the activity should be avoided.

Activity Ideas

While many of the activities meant for toddlers can be adapted to suit the needs and interests of older children, here are a few more outdoor physical development activities for 3- to 5-year-olds and indoor games to play with pre-schoolers:

1. Duck, Duck, Goose

This indoor physical activity is perfect for pre-schoolers, particularly for those four years old and up. No equipment is necessary, and there really isn't a limit on the number of players you need, though you'll probably want at least four.

In Duck, Duck, Goose, children sit in a circle facing one another. One person is "It," and they walk around the circle, tapping the heads of each player and calling each of them "Duck" until they call one player "Goose." "Goose" will then stand from the circle and chase after "It" around the circle. "It" needs to reach the spot where "Goose" had been sitting before "Goose" catches them.

If "It" reaches the spot before getting tagged, "Goose" becomes "It." If "It" gets tagged before reaching the spot, they sit in the middle of the circle until a new "It" is tagged.

Duck, Duck, Goose is great for getting kids moving quickly!

2. Musical Chairs

Use an adapted, no-lose version of this activity to keep all children up and moving while having fun. Place chairs in a row or in a circle facing outward. Play a song or have the children sing a short rhyme while circling the chairs. When the song is over, the children sit in the chair closest to them.

Continually change the movement with each new song, such as skipping, hopping or crawling to keep kids engaged and active.

3. Huckle Buckle Beanstalk

This game can be played indoors or outdoors, although playing outside will definitely make for a bigger challenge! To start, children will form a circle and pick one person to stand in the middle of the circle. The person in the middle of the circle will choose an object that they will show to everyone else in the circle. Then while the other players have their eyes closed, the player in the middle will hide the object, return to the middle of the circle, and say “Huckle Buckle Beanstalk” to start the game.

All of the other players will search the area for the object. When they find the object, they’ll return to the circle and whisper, “Huckle Buckle Beanstalk.”

To play a no-lose version of this game, either wait until every player has found the object or start over once the first player finds the object. This way, every child can keep playing, and no one has to sit out.

4. Please, Mr. Crocodile, May We Cross the River

Also shortened to Please, Mr. Crocodile, this is a fun, exciting game that requires no equipment and is great for pre-schoolers.

All of the players stand beside each other on one side of the room or play area. One of the players is chosen as Mr. or Ms. Crocodile, and they stand in the middle of the room. The players call, “Please, Mr. Crocodile, may we cross the river? If not, why not? What’s your favourite colour?” Mr. Crocodile announces a colour, and all the players who are wearing that colour are safe to cross to the other side of the room past Mr. Crocodile.

After those players have crossed to the other side, the players who are not wearing the colour Mr. Crocodile called out then try to run to the other side of the room without getting caught by Mr. Crocodile. Whoever gets caught becomes the next Mr. Crocodile.

5. Leaf Play

Though many adults don't love the task of raking up leaves in the autumn, kids love raking and playing in leaves. During this activity, kids can rake and collect leaves into piles. Then they can jump into the piles, toss the leaves up in the air and crunch them in their hands and under their feet.

If there aren't many leaves available due to a lack of trees, you may want to take the kids for a walk so they can collect leaves or crunch through them on the ground. With leaf play, pre-schoolers can develop their jumping and throwing skills.

6. Balance Beam

Walking on a balance beam can be a great indoor or outdoor activity for pre-schoolers. If the activity is taking place indoors, you can make a line on the floor with painter's tape. Encourage kids to walk forward, backward and sideways while staying on the line. Since there is no elevation, this is also a safe version of this activity.

If the activity is taking place outdoors, you can use a line of chalk, a rope or a plank of wood as your balance beam. Once the pre-schoolers master walking a straight line, you can add zigzags or semicircles to create more of a challenge. With this activity, pre-schoolers can develop their balancing skills.

7. Freeze Dance

Play a song for kids to dance to. Whenever the song is paused, they have to freeze in place. Kids will have fun dancing, and they'll also develop skills for self-regulation, similar to games like musical chairs.

8. Bowling

Select items that are easy to knock over, like empty water or soda bottles, and set them up like pins in a bowling alley. Children can roll a ball toward the pins and see how many they can knock down. Have pre-schoolers count how many pins they managed to knock down. Let them roll a second time as they would in a real bowling alley. If they want, they can also write down their scores.



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9. Hopscotch

While outdoors, take some chalk to a sidewalk or blacktop to draw blocks for your game of hopscotch. This game will get kids hopping, balancing, and counting. You can also adapt this hopscotch game to be an indoor activity by using tape to set up your squares.

10. Jumping on Trampolines

For kids who are old enough, find an indoor trampoline park where they can go to jump on trampolines and hang out with their friends. Trampolines are a ton of fun and a great activity for some high-intensity exercise and improving balance. For children who are too young for a trampoline park, you can buy a trampoline for home that's equipped with the right safety features to keep kids safe while they're having fun.

11. Designs With Sponges

On a hot day, provide kids with sponges that they can soak in tubs of water and throw at a cement surface or wall to make designs. Alternatively, you can let kids use washable paint for their designs. With this activity, kids will develop their throwing skills and coordination.

12. Jump Over the River

If outdoors, you can use chalk to draw two parallel lines about a foot apart to create a river. Instruct children to jump over the river by bending at the knees, extending their arms behind their backs, and swinging their arms forward when they take off and land on their feet on the other side. If indoors, use tape to create your river instead.

These are just a few of many activities and games that can get pre-schoolers moving and having a blast!

Have loads of fun joining in with these activities.

These suggestions are taken from

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