

Let's get moving with two year olds

The current guidelines from the UK Chief Medical Officers are that toddlers need at least 180 minutes (3 hours) of varied physical activity spread throughout the day. More is better. Evidence confirms that low levels of physical activity is a contributing factor to child obesity and influences a wide range of short- and long-term health and developmental outcomes.

A two year old's play is very physical. The importance of movement and action is key to their learning and development. It supports physical health, personal and social well-being. Two year olds use their whole bodies to explore, think and communicate. Being active every day provides a foundation for a healthier and happier life says the UK's Chief Medical Officers. In childhood, movement develops muscle and bone strength, co-ordination and motor skill and builds confidence. Research shows that being active is also essential for brain development. Movement activates the brain, creating nerve connections essential for motor and sensory development.

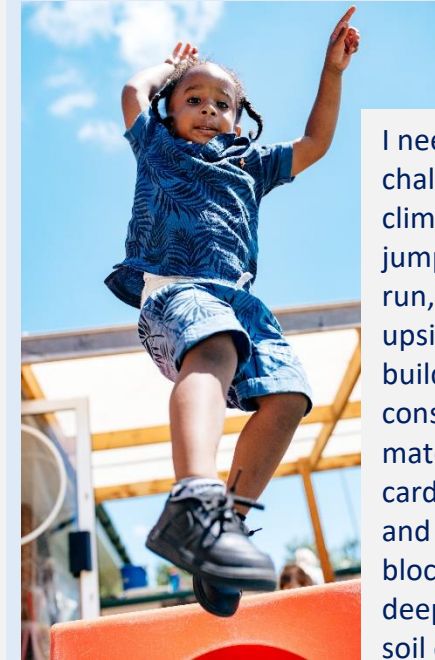
Toddlers are not meant to be still for long periods of time. As practitioners, we need to provide challenging physical environments both inside and outdoors and work with families to share the importance of physical activity and the link with child development.

A two-year old needs:

- to be active most of the day in lots of different ways and explore movement freely both indoors and outside
- a challenging physical environment with obstacle courses, tunnels, bridges, furniture to climb on, raised platforms and steps to practice climbing, mud and sand pits to dig, buckets of water to carry
- a space to move indoors, not chairs and tables. Too much furniture gets in the way
- to play games that involve making moving fun e.g. chasing, follow-my-leader and roly-poly games

Role of the adult:

- Provide physically active play environments both indoors and outside with plenty of opportunities for movement such as washing windows, bikes and painting fences (with water and large brushes and rollers), throwing balls, pushing wheel barrows or trucks, filling and lifting buckets, carrying heavy objects, dancing, running, jumping, spinning, hopping, digging and sweeping.
- Support and extend language by describing actions *twirl, jump, crouch, flutter, sway, roll, glide, hover, leap* and name body parts
- share expressive words to accompany movement; *woosh, whee, boing*
- Boost confidence with lots of specific praise and support.
- Present challenge – *can you roll all the way to the end of the mat, jump as high as the trees, slither like a snake?*



I need physical challenge! Can I climb, roll, balance, jump, push, swing, run, spin, hang upside down? Can I build with large construction materials like cardboard boxes and wooden blocks? Can I dig deep holes in the soil or sand?

Reflection:

What does movement look like in your setting?

What indoor opportunities are given for children to spontaneously move? How do indoor opportunities compare with outdoors? Consider establishing an indoor movement space with bolsters, cushions, gym balls, balance / wobble boards, spinning tops/ rockers, tactile stepping-stones, tunnels, elastic / lycra rings, bean bags, scarves and ribbon sticks for two year olds to access freely.

How do you support children to take risks and be active? How are you building trust, confidence and independence? Do you congratulate children when they have a go with specific comments that draw upon the achievement? 'wow I saw you having a go at jumping off the...'