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CANADIAN SPORT FOR LIFE

Developing Physical Literacy

The learning and practice of fundamental movement skills are the basic building blocks for the development of physical literacy. Much like learning the alphabet and phonics are the fundamental skills needed to eventually read Shakespeare, or identifying numbers and learning to add and subtract are the fundamental skills needed to balance a cheque-book, the development of fundamental movement and sport skills is critical if children are to feel confident when they engage in physical activity for fun and for health or for competition and the pursuit of excellence.

Physical literacy also includes the ability to "read" what is going on around them in an activity setting and react appropriately to those events.

For full physical literacy, children should learn fundamental movement and sport skills in the four basic environments:

- On the ground
- In the water
- On snow and ice
- In the air

A developing child needs to go through a series of stages for almost every skill. The goal should be to help each child move to the next most mature version of the skill they are learning, rather than pushing them to perform the skill the way an adult would. As a child grows and develops nerve cells make more connections, while at the same time, the muscles of the body are getting stronger. Until the brain is mature enough, and the muscles strong enough, a child simply cannot learn the skill, and trying to teach the child does little good.

At a certain point in maturation, the child has the potential to perform a particular skill, and now they have to learn it. As the skill begins to emerge naturally, learning can be dramatically improved through opportunities

for fun practice using lots of different equipment and materials. Giving the child some simple instruction and lots of practice can develop confidence that stays with them for life – although this may not speed up the learning process.

For every emerging skill there is a "best" time for learning when helping the child through simple instruction and practice pays great dividends. While the "best" time to teach a particular skill varies, there is great consistency in the sequence in which children learn skills. An indication of the best time to teach some of the more common fundamental movement skills can be found at www.canadiansportforlife.ca.

Running, jumping, catching, kicking, throwing and hitting something with a stick, bat, or racquet of some kind, are the basic building blocks of the many sports played by the vast majority of people on Earth, and a person who can perform these fundamental skills well can learn to play many sports with ease.

For children to have success in sport – either as a health related recreational activity or in competition, it is important that they master fundamental movement skills before learning fundamental sport skills, and important that they learn fundamental sport skills, before specific sport techniques.

Research shows that without the development of physical literacy, many children and youth withdraw from physical activity and sport and turn to more inactive and/or unhealthy choices during their leisure time. Children tell us that not having the skills to play is one major reason they drop out of physical activity and organized sport.

The content of this article is taken from the Canadian Sport for Life resources which can be found at www.canadiansportforlife.ca.