Being physically active can improve a child’s overall health and reduce their risk of obesity and chronic disease as they grow older. But studies have shown that providing more physical activity simply by increasing time for outdoor play is not enough.⁴ For those children who are naturally skilled and athletic, this may be a good approach as they enjoy physical activity and look for more opportunities. This is especially true for children who come from athletic or physically active families. For many children, however, sports and physical activity aren’t natural, aren’t easy and it may not be fun! For these children, more time won’t change the way they use that time. They need more guidance.

**SKILL MASTERY**

Physical activity answers the question, how much activity does a child get. Physical fitness tells us how strong his heart, muscle and bones are. Skill mastery, a very important component of physical activity, addresses the child’s level of physical skill and ability. While some children may have developmental delays or impairments that need professional attention, many children simply lack the skills necessary for them to live an active lifestyle. Children should be provided opportunities to master both fundamental movement skills such as hop on one foot, balance, jump, spin and skip and perceptual motor skills, those that connect the brain with the body like crossing the feet or moving in slow motion.

**WHAT ARE FUNDAMENTAL MOVEMENT SKILLS**

Fundamental movement skills are a specific set of skills that involve using different parts of the child’s body and form the “building blocks” for more complex and specialized skills they will need throughout their lives.² Many of these fundamental movement skills are specified in state pre-kindergarten standards and describe what children should be able to do before they start kindergarten. Examples include hop on one foot, spin on one foot, step forward and back, and balance on one foot for 5
Confidence NOW = Success LATER!

Children who are confident in their movement skills at an early age are more likely to be physically active in later years.\(^4\) Gaining confidence and skill development doesn’t just happen overnight, however, and we should not rely on the natural maturation of the child.

“Maturation is not a miracle!” – Jane Clark\(^3\)

Children should learn and practice 3 types of Fundamental Movement Skills:

**LOCOMOTOR**
Activities that move children from one place to the next (locomotion) including:
- Running
- Walking
- Marching
- Hopping
- Jumping
- Skipping
- Stepping
  (Forward, Backward, Sideways)

**NON-LOCOMOTOR**
Activities that require little or no movement; the child stays in one spot (stationary) such as:
- Bending
- Stretching
- Swinging
- Spinning
- Twisting

**OBJECT CONTROL**
Activities that involve small muscle groups that allow for the handling of an object (e.g. a ball) such as:
- Throwing
- Catching
- Bouncing
- Dribbling
- Kicking

BUILDING SELF-EFFICACY

Teaching and practicing in early childhood years is the key to helping children master these fundamental skills. Waiting until elementary school to teach these skills when specific sports and other physical activities are introduced, contributes to the child’s lack of self-efficacy.\(^5\) Famous psychologist Albert Bandura defines self-efficacy as the child’s self-belief in his competence or chances of successfully accomplishing a task. For example, if a child is confident in his ability to throw, catch and hit a ball, he is more willing to try baseball with his friends believing that he will succeed. If a child can do a forward roll, spin on one foot, and jump high she is much more enthusiastic to try dance, cheerleading or gymnastics.

On the other hand, children, who are not skilled, will gravitate away from active sports, games and dance towards less threatening sedentary hobbies.\(^6\) This is especially noticeable as children move from childhood to adolescence in what’s known as the “physical activity divide”. Low-skilled, inactive children suddenly perceive themselves as poorly skilled and may withdraw, unlike their higher skilled, more active friends who find physical activity rewarding and fun.\(^6\)

REFERENCES