

What is Physical Literacy?

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“Physical Literacy can be described as the motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge and understanding to value and take responsibility for engagement in physical activities for life.” (Whitehead, 2014)

Just as children need to learn how to read and write, they also need to learn how to move. Physical literacy is developed through the experience of movement and the development of “fundamental movement skills” and is an essential part of the development of the whole child. The best way to develop physical literacy is to engage in a variety of activities in a variety of environments (i.e. water, air, ground, ice, snow, etc.). The more exposure a child has to different movements in different environments, the better their brain gets at creating the neural connections needed to form a strong foundation for future movement and physical activity. When a child can move *competently*, their *confidence* grows and they are more likely to engage in physical activity throughout their lifespan. Canada’s Guidelines for Physical Activity recommends that children and youth aged 5 - 17 get at least 60 minutes of moderate- to vigorous-intensity physical activity daily for health benefits. The latest stats show that that only 7% of Canadian children aged 5 – 11 and 4% aged 12 – 17 are meeting these guidelines (*2014 Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth, Active Healthy Kids Canada*). By helping our children develop physical literacy, we are increasing their chances of meeting these guidelines, giving them a greater chance to live longer, healthier, happier lives.

You can read the whole Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth here: www.activehealthykids.ca/reportcard

Next month: *What are Fundamental Movement Skills?*

What are Fundamental Movement Skills?

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Fundamental movement skills are the building blocks of teaching and learning movement. Just as learning the A-B-C's and 1-2-3's allow us to read, write and count, developing fundamental movement skills help build the foundation that will allow us to move with competence and confidence, giving us more opportunities to stay healthy and physically active throughout the lifespan.

Fundamental movement skills can be broken down into stability skills such as *twisting, bending, collapsing, dodging, rolling, twirling, balancing, turning, swinging, stopping, pushing, pulling, bending, stretching*; locomotor skills such as *walking, running, skipping, hopping, jumping, leaping, galloping, cycling, swimming, sliding, gliding, skating*; and object manipulative skills *such as catching, throwing, kicking, trapping, striking*. Developing a strong foundation of fundamental movement skills allow us to put these together into more complex movements – just as letters and words put together make sentences! These skills don't just translate to sport specific skills – we need these skills to participate in day-to-day life whether you are a firefighter or simply a grandparent who wants to keep up and play with your grandchildren.

Learning to become competent in a variety of fundamental movement skills is an essential part of the development of physical literacy and it's actually simple to do! So skip your way to the park, hop to the dinner table, brush your teeth on one foot and wiggle until you giggle!

Visit <http://60minkidsclub.org/> for a breakdown of fundamental movement skills and lessons and activities for learning!

Next Month: *Giving Children an Active Start*

Giving Children an Active Start

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Developing physical literacy is an essential part of healthy child development. Children who are exposed to a multitude of movement experiences in a variety of environments are more confident and competent movers, thus giving them a greater chance of remaining active throughout their lifespan. The first five years of a child's life are the most important in terms of development as the brain is busy growing and creating neural connections with each new experience. The more a child moves their body in different ways, the more connections that are created and the more that child explores those movements, the stronger those connections become building a strong foundation for future learning and development.

You can help a child develop physical literacy as early as infancy. Tummy time is a great place to start and as a child grows and develops, making sure the home or care environment is safely set up for exploration of movement (different levels to pull up on, crawl under and over, etc.) combined with lots of positive interaction and encouragement will support an *active start* for the child. As children grow through their toddler and preschool years, it is important to continue to offer many opportunities for movement exploration and outdoor play year round. Free play (meaning unstructured without adult direction) is a very important part of healthy development for children in the early years. Not only does it foster the development of physical literacy, it also helps develop social, emotional and cognitive skills, imagination and creativity. So don't worry if feel your child is not participating in enough programs before the age of 5 – although some programs can be great, the best thing you can do is simply let them PLAY!

Looking for fun things to do as a family outdoors?

Visit <http://bfflcalgary.com/event/myactivefamily/> and take part in the #myactivefamily challenge!

Next Month: *Risky Play – Worth the Risk?*

Risky Play – Worth the Risk?

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We live in a society where “hyper-parenting” or “helicopter parenting” is becoming more prevalent. This style of parenting is seen as a way to protect children and lower their risk of injury and other incidents... but what if we are actually hindering their development and increasing their risk of injury and disease as they age?

Let me be clear, we need to continue to love and protect our children but we also need to give them some space and allow them to take *age appropriate risks* while engaged in active outdoor play. This means allowing children to run (fast), climb (high), play (rough) and explore (alone). Children are actually pretty good judges of what their bodies can and cannot physically do and letting them create these boundaries for themselves rather than us adults creating them based on our own fear, will teach them how to recognize, evaluate and manage risk as they grow and develop – a skill set that will prove invaluable as they navigate their way through life. Risky play is essential to healthy child development and helps develop physical literacy too – both which lead to longer, healthier and happier lives.

As an adult, you need to decide what is age appropriate risk for your child(ren), for example, you wouldn't let your 2 year old play outside alone, but you could let them crawl up on a log if they are inclined to. Once you have decided on this, your next step is... well... backwards! Step back and let your child(ren) explore their environment and interact with it with their bodies. Expect some bumps and bruises along the way, it's all part of the process and is worth the risk for long term health!

Visit <http://www.participaction.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/EN-Active-Outdoor-Play-Position-Statement-FINAL-DESIGN.pdf> to learn more about the benefits of risky play!

Next Month: *Connecting Physical Literacy and Nature*

Connecting Physical Literacy and Nature

Leah Yardley BSc. Kin., CSEP-CEP

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When we talk about physical literacy, we are not just talking about the physical act of learning how to move, we also need to consider what motivates us to move. How do we develop a love for movement that will keep us coming back for more?

One easy way to do this is to simply spend time outdoors! Exploring nature's playground is a great way to help children develop physical literacy – there are plenty of things to climb, balance on, hop over and lots of open space to run and get that heart pumping and feeling good. Spending time in nature is good for the whole family – the benefits are seemingly endless – stress reduction, reduction in ADHD symptoms, lower blood pressure, better grades in school... even better eyesight, just to name a few. The research is undeniable – spending time in nature is essential for good health... the problem is that we are actually spending more time indoors.

So the challenge to you is to “unplug” and get outside.... Even in the winter. Winter is our longest season here in Canada but it shouldn't stop us from enjoying what the great outdoors has to offer and there are plenty of activities to do in the snow and on the ice. Don't forget that sliding and gliding are two very important fundamental movement skills and winter is a great time to practice and develop those skills.

So here's to vitamin D, green (and white!) and feeling GOOD – see you out there!

Visit http://www.parks-parcs.ca/english/ConnectingCanadians-English_web.pdf to learn more about the benefits of connecting to nature.

Next Month: *Become a Better Hockey Player... Play More Soccer?*

Become a Better Hockey Player... Play More Soccer?

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Hockey is not just a sport in Canada; it is a part of our culture. Many young Canadian children aspire to be the next “great one” of the sport and many parents support this dream by enrolling their child(ren) in their local community hockey program and then often supplement with more hockey in the spring and summer months to ensure they are getting the best chance to become an excellent hockey player. What if I told you that playing less hockey and participating in other activities and sports can actually have a greater effect on performance in hockey than... more hockey?

The truth is that although there are some sports (i.e. gymnastics) that require early specialization, most sports don't. Before the age of 12, children should still be participating in a variety of different activities and sports. This helps them develop a large range of Fundamental Movement Skills that will help them to be competent and confident movers, which can translate to lifelong physical activity participation. Most of today's elite athletes did not specialize in their sports until after the age of 12! The reality is that only a very small percentage of children will reach elite status within a sport so exposing them to a variety of sports and activities will increase their chances of them finding some activities that they enjoy doing and that they can continue to enjoy throughout their lives.

Visit www.canadiansportforlife.ca to learn about the Canada's Long Term Athlete Development Model.

Next Month: Creating Positive Experiences, Keeping it FUN!

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Find the JOY in the JOURNEY. You've probably heard something similar to this pertaining to life, generally speaking, but maybe you haven't thought about it as it relates to physical activity. Most of you have heard by now that in order to live a healthy, long life with a lowered risk of chronic disease and more independent years later in life, that you need to engage in regular physical activity – but this doesn't mean you have to head to the gym and run on the treadmill or use weight machines to achieve these benefits (although there is nothing wrong with this if it's what you enjoy!).

Staying active can look very different to different people... the key is to find something that you enjoy, as you are more likely to continue to participate in something that is fun. For children, it is important to be aware that physical activity experiences can be a deciding factor in whether they continue to engage in physical activity throughout their lives or not. Negative experiences can be in the form of negative comments from a coach or peer, feeling unsafe, or simply being underdressed for outdoor winter play. As adults, we play a big role in helping to shape children's physical activity experiences – whether you are a volunteer coach, a teacher, a parent or grandparent or a caregiver, remember to keep it fun and that encouraging words can go a long way in the life of a child. Positive physical activity experiences build confidence and self-esteem in both children and adults – and having fun is important at any age!

Visit <http://www.healthyalberta.com/1248.htm> for ways to be active and have fun as a family!

Next Month: Learning to Move and Moving to Learn - Physical Literacy at School

Learning to Move and Moving to Learn - Physical Literacy at School

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We know that learning to move, through the development of fundamental movement skills and exploration of movement in various environments, helps us to develop physical literacy – but did you know that movement can help improve academic performance?

There is plenty of research that shows a positive relationship between physical activity and learning. Regular bouts of physical activity throughout the school day prepares the brain for learning by improving cognitive function, attention and concentration and can improve test scores and academic behaviors. Additionally, schools that adopt regular physical activity breaks and interventions tend to have lower behavioral incidences and less bullying. Being creative and incorporating physical activity throughout the day at school is a simple way to not only enhance learning but also a great way to support a positive school environment and of course, contributes to long term health benefits – a win-win all around!

Visit <http://canadiansportforlife.ca/news/dont-walk-hallway> to read about a great physical literacy and activity intervention at Panorama Hills School in Calgary.

Next Month: Active Today, Active for Life

Active Today, Active For Life

Ashley Fox, BKin, CSEP-CEP & Integrative Health Coach
University of Calgary, Be Fit For Life Centre

When it comes to leading a physically active lifestyle, the benefits are endless and the messages often seem simple, find something you like to do and you will be more likely to do it. However, when it comes to physical activity levels, statistics repeatedly report low levels of activity in children, youth, adulthood and into older adulthood. Physical activity will serve different purposes for us all at different ages and phases in our life but the importance and value it has remain high throughout the lifespan.

Many people find that by figuring out what motivates them to move will help them to sustain a more active lifestyle. It may be the ability to run in a local 10km race, keep up with your growing children, spending time in nature, a friendly street hockey game with your friends or complete the tasks of daily living with little aches and pains. In addition to the numerous physical benefits experienced other benefits often increased confidence, social connections and stress relief.

In a sedentary society filled with many modern conveniences to make things “quick” or “easy” perhaps we also need to look at the benefits of avoiding these options. Simple things like avoiding the drive thru, parking further away, and getting off a bus stop early. Or when meeting a friend for coffee, take it to go and head out for a walk.

So take a moment to ask yourself, why do I move and what type of activity brings me joy. Then take the first step, a step to a more active, connected and invigorated way of life... the active way!

Watch Dr. Michael Evans’ video “23 ½ Hours: What is the single best thing we can do for our health” here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aUaInS6HIGo> to learn more about living longer and decreasing your chances of chronic disease.

Next Month: Setting the Stage: The Importance of Good Role Models

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We can all agree that it is important for children to be physically active and that there are many benefits to leading a healthy and physically active life – but is it good enough for our children to be active, while we watch from the sidelines?

Even if you, as an adult have active pursuits of your own, taking the time to actually participate in physical activity with your child or children that you work with can have a lasting positive effect on their lives. Our words and actions shape their experiences. Playing with them shows them that its fun for all ages, encouraging them helps build their confidence and self-esteem. Whether you are a parent, a teacher, a coach, a recreation leader – or all of the above – never underestimate the influence you have on a child’s life and the outcome of their future. Creating positive experiences through being an active and positive role model for children is a great way to help them enjoy physical activity and will help increase the chance of them staying active throughout their lifespan.

So next time you are at the park, skip the bench and give yourself a play break too... you might surprise yourself and have a bit of fun!

There are some great examples and tips on how to be a great and active role model for kids: <http://activeforlife.com/active-example-for-your-kids/>

Next Month: Active Communities – a Place to Live, Work and Play

Active Communities – a Place to Live, Work and Play

Lea Norris, Sport for Life Society

The sense of community that was once an integral part of our lives is much less prevalent today. Our fast paced, technologically advanced society has resulted in an increase in isolation and detachment from our communities, and an increase in social and mental health issues.

A strong sense of community benefits the individual, the community and the greater society. Physical activity can play a powerful role in fostering stronger communities as it is often the only opportunity we have to interact with others in our neighbourhood. Simply saying hello to fellow dog walkers as you pass by or inviting others to join your baseball game at the park can create new connections and lead to community cohesiveness. Taking it a step further, we can be more intentional in creating opportunities to connect, whether it is a regular weekly walk with a few neighbours or an organized club or program. The benefits of even a few minutes of social interaction and physical activity are long lasting and increase the pride and enjoyment we feel for our community.

Municipal planners are becoming more aware of the need to design spaces that foster activity and interaction, but individuals can also help create supportive environments. Encouraging your community association to include physical activity on their agenda is one simple step that could go a long way. There are many organizations that can provide support or advice including your local recreation department, community planners, or exercise professionals. Committing to make physical activity an easy and safe choice in your community will lead to a great sense of belonging, leading to happier and healthier citizens, and ultimately a more stable and supportive society.

Visit The Alberta Recreation and Parks Association website for resources, project and funding ideas: <http://arpaonline.ca>

Next Month: Becoming a Health Champion

Becoming a Health Champion

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We know that there are many benefits to living an active life – from reduced risk of chronic diseases to simply feeling good day to day. But how do we make a difference in our families, schools, communities and workplaces?

The first step starts with YOU – live by example – choose a healthy, active lifestyle for others to see and to be inspired by. This is especially important in your family, you cannot expect your children to make healthy choices if you don't model this behaviour yourself. Your actions are important.... But so is your voice. Becoming a health champion and advocate is a great way to change the environment and culture where you live, work and play. Whether you are planning family time exploring the outdoors, initiating walking meetings at your workplace, volunteering for parent council at your child's school or ensuring that you or your parents have opportunities to be active as you or they age, your voice and your actions matter and can make a difference. So speak up and pave the way for you, your family and friends, and future generations to reap the benefits of communities that support long term health and wellness.

Visit: <http://arpaonline.ca/program/choosewell/> to learn about the Communities Choosewell program in Alberta. Click "Online Toolkit" for access to a variety of resources and recorded webinars.