

# Father Times

## Fathers and Children's Physical Development

Issue 7

A newsletter for fathers and father figures of young children

### Taking Time for Activity

Seeing a baby roll over for the first time or watching a preschooler learn to pound a nail are precious moments in the life of a father or father figure. They are also growing moments — times when you can see the ways in which a young child is growing and developing new skills and abilities. Rolling over and pounding a nail are examples of physical abilities. Think about the importance of physical abilities and the role they play in your own life.

A child needs many physical abilities just to adjust to the world. Think about it. Learning to see and recognize others. Rolling over. Holding a bottle or cup. Crawling around objects. Grasping a spoon. Children love to stretch their muscles and try new physical challenges. Fathers also tend to enjoy physical interaction and activity. So, get out of your easy chair and into the world of physical activity with children. Your children will appreciate it and grow, while you just might find yourself living healthier too!

### Once Upon A Time . . .

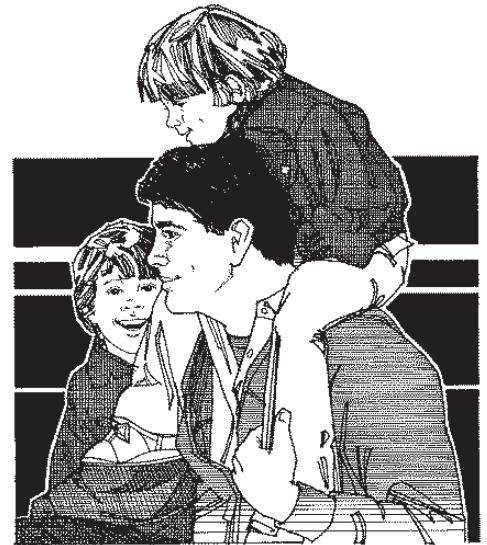
#### Play Ball!

Bill looked forward to his family reunion each summer with a mix of excitement and dread. He loved to get together with the whole clan, feeling a sense of history and belonging. Although they saw each other all together but once a year, there was something very special about being a part of this group of good people. They held the standards and values of the family, and they passed on the work of being good mothers and fathers to those now parenting the young. That's the part of the reunion Bill loved. That and the food, of course.

Bill came from a long line of exceptional cooks, but unfortunately he also came from a long line of athletes who loved playing ball at the annual reunion. But Bill didn't play a lot of ball and so had sometimes felt distant during that part of the activities.

Bill, Marilyn and the kids walked to the park every decent evening in the spring, summer and fall and rode bikes to the store instead of driving. Bill swam over his noon hours during the winter. They stayed healthy. They just didn't spend much time competing in team sports.

This year, instead of running on to the field for the annual reunion softball game, Bill had decided to focus on fun interaction with his kids, nieces and nephews. Bill pulled a duffel bag out of his trunk and shouted, "Whiffle ball, everybody! Let's start batting practice!" His own kids and a gaggle of nieces, nephews, and a few other relatives joined Bill on a neighboring field.



The next hour or two before lunch Bill, his kids, and other family members ran, laughed, played, and had fun hitting the whiffle ball all over the field. Bill felt happy that he'd let family members know ahead of time that he'd organize a separate "play ball" activity this year for the kids or others who weren't yet ready for a softball competition. They had a great time.

As they finished playing and got ready for lunch, Bill watched the laughing children and said to himself, "You know, you don't have to be a star athlete to have fun with your children. It's getting involved that counts." By the smiles on the faces of his two kids, Garrett and Hannah, Bill could tell that he was right.

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## What Children Need

### Fathers and Physical Skills

Young children need a lot of support as they develop physical skills. The type of support needed is different depending on a child's age and abilities. Some points to remember for helping children of different ages as they develop physically:

- **Babies, 0-6 Months** – Babies need support! A young baby's head is equal to one-fourth of its total body. This means that handling a baby includes carefully supporting its head. The baby will work hard to pick up his own head and start looking toward voices, especially familiar voices, much earlier than you might expect. This is why it's vital that fathers get involved with their babies right away. You want to have a voice and a presence that is familiar to your infant. So, support your baby's head and move so they can see and connect with you often.
- **Babies, 6-18 Months** – Older babies need safe spaces to spread out, roll and crawl when they are ready. Babies feel encouraged to stretch and creep when a favorite toy is placed just out of reach. It can be frustrating unless your baby sees you there on the sidelines cheering her on! Encourage movement, provide toys to reach for, roll balls back and forth, just get down on your baby's level and physically interact.
- **1 to 3 Years** – Toddlers love to move. As you try to keep up, keep thinking about the muscles this child is developing with her constant motion. Supply her with materials that encourage movement such as a low toddler slide, cushions, a mattress on the floor for tumbling, and balls for chasing and kicking. Active, physical play like walking, running, jumping and throwing helps to develop large muscles.

- **1 to 3 Years** – Remember, small muscles need work too. Let your child pick cereal, peas, bits of cheese or fruit from a dish. Let him try to take his own clothes off. Undressing is the first step to dressing independently. As he gets closer to two and demands "ME DO IT," you will find that planning extra time for every activity is a must if you are going to avoid a struggle and provide opportunities for him to work independently. Picking up food, managing buttons on clothes — these all help small muscles develop. Be patient and help your child as needed.
- **3 to 6 Years** – Preschool and kindergarten age children are becoming more social. They are learning to play with others and play what others want to play. This is no time for you to drop out of play. Children from ages 3 to 6 will need

you now more than ever to help them learn how to throw a ball, use a glove and bat, and handle all of the other equipment that intrigues them at this age. Keep in mind that this is a time for learning and don't expect your children to be experts.

- **3 to 6 Years** – Children are learning to play sports and interactive games like tag or hide-and-seek. The score needs to be far less important than letting everyone have plenty of turns and exercise. Gently introduce the rules along the way. Dads can be very helpful in making sure injuries are kept to a minimum by only allowing plastic equipment made for the age, and requiring safety equipment or enforcing safety rules. Children also love it when dads voluntarily participate with them and their friends in active play and games.

## Fathering Facts

### On Fathers and Physical Activity

Children thrive on physical activity. Whether learning to draw or taking first steps, a child's experiences with physical growth and activity provide an important beginning in the early years. Fathers often enjoy physical interaction with children and can be good companions in this area. What does the research

say about fathers and children's physical activity? Here are some key findings:

- A study of infants in the first six months of life showed that fathers or father figures tend to provide more physical and social stimulation than mothers in parent-child interactions.
- Fathers are found to engage in more physical and spontaneous types of play with children than mothers, helping children to develop various physical abilities.
- A longitudinal study of fathers with young children showed that fathers enjoy games with children that are based on activity and social interaction.
- Research shows that children who have fathers that play with them and provide physical affection do better in interactions with peers.
- The type of skills that fathers tend to develop in children through physical play and activity include teamwork, competition, independence, risk-taking, and initiative. Also, large muscle skills and hand-eye coordination are often fostered through a father's physical interactions with children.



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# From Muscles to Motor Skills

Think about the words **physical development**. They encompass so many different tasks and abilities. What are some of them and what role do they play?

The term **motor development** means physical growth, or growth in the ability of children to use their bodies and physical skills. Physical abilities are the “motor” that makes your child run — literally!

## Gross Motor Skills

Large muscle development is necessary for walking, lifting, and other types of physical activities. Some things to consider include:

- Large muscle skills are developed through movement of the body from place to place such as hopping, jumping, running, walking, leaping, galloping and skipping.
- Toddlers and preschoolers have a higher center of gravity and are prone to falls because the legs and body are not developed in proportion to the upper body region.
- Most three and four year olds are actively using their large muscles in running, wiggling, and jumping. Their fine motor skills like cutting are not as developed.

## Fine Motor Skills

Small muscle development is necessary for grasping, cutting, writing, and other types of physical activities.

- Small muscle skills are developed through controlled use of the hands and feet, such as grasping, opening and closing hands, throwing and catching. This is why playing with clay, drawing pictures, or stacking blocks are good physical activities.

## Balance and Coordination Skills

Balance and coordination skills are necessary for catching, clapping, eating, playing and other types of physical activities. Some things to consider include:

- Balance and coordination skills involve using the hands and eyes at the same time. Activities like painting, clay modeling, sorting small objects like buttons, building block towers, or copying designs all help the child learn to use (coordinate) the hands and eyes.

Running, jumping, skipping, hopping, drawing, cutting, pasting, stacking — these are the skills that young children develop as they grow physically. They make possible the interactions and

activities that bring richness and enjoyment to anyone’s life. From muscles to motor skills, the unfolding picture of a child’s physical development is an exciting experience to observe.

## Time Together

## Activities for Fathers and Children – Physical Fun

This section provides a variety of activities that you can do to spend time with your children and have physical fun together. Enjoy these opportunities for parent-child interaction!

- Drop a blanket over the card table to create a cave. Get down and crawl inside with your little one. Bring snacks!
- Play some good, old-fashioned “catch” with your child. Roll a ball back and forth with a younger child, and throw it to an older child. Use soft plastic balls, nerf balls, or even other items like a frisbee.
- Give your child O-shaped cereal to string on a piece of yarn. Help your child to make a bracelet or necklace, or hang it in a nearby tree for bird food and nesting materials.
- Plan a series of races with your children. Race to the end of the hallway and exchange a shoe. Run back with each other’s shoe. See who can carry an egg on a spoon to the end of the yard and back. Be creative! Race the clock to see how fast you and your preschooler can get pajamas on. Write it down, and try it again the next night.
- Make an obstacle course out of chairs, cushions, tape, boxes, hoops, etc. Let your imagination and available equipment be your guide. See how your children choose to use the course.
- Play “Catch the Caboose” by stringing all your family members together with hands on the hips of the person in front of you. The last person is the caboose. The engine leads his cars around a little and then tries to catch the caboose in a wild version of tag. Be mindful of the “shorter” cars. This a good outside activity.
- Add a little water to white glue. Help your three-year-old “paint” it on a piece of dark construction paper. Blow dandelion seeds at the paper.
- Cut the center out of a coffee can or similar plastic lids. These can then be used as rings for play. Turn a chair or stool upside down for an instant ring toss game.
- Give your child a small pillow. Ask him to balance it on his head while walking. Can he do it while hopping? Can he balance it on his shoulder? Foot? Knee?
- Take turns being the pencil and the paper. The “paper” lays on the floor or sits on the front edge of a chair so that the “pencil” can write a letter or number or simple picture on the “paper” with their finger on the other one’s back. The paper has to guess what the pencil has drawn. You can try the tiny version of this game by using the back of the hand for a “notepad” sized paper while waiting for a doctor’s appointment or your lunch at a restaurant.
- Small muscles develop by playing with play dough. To exercise bigger arm muscles, and work out aggression, give your child a toy hammer or rolling pin to use with the play dough. Make some play dough with your child using this recipe:

### Cooked Play Dough

- 1 cup flour
- 1 Tablespoon cream of tartar
- ½ cup salt
- 1 Tablespoon vegetable oil
- 1 cup water
- 1 teaspoon food coloring

Measure into a saucepan and cook over medium heat until it forms a ball. Knead the warm dough, and play, pound, create and shape. Store in covered container.



# Our “Top Ten List”

## Tools for Physical Development

Children need tools and materials — toys essentially — that they can use to develop physical skills. Our “top ten” list includes:

- 10 Stacking cups and stacking rings
- 9 Blocks
- 8 Whisks, spoons, and spatulas
- 7 Pots and pans
- 6 Rattles, keys, teething toys
- 5 Cardboard boxes
- 4 Large outdoor safe spaces for running, climbing
- 3 Balls for throwing, rolling
- 2 Pets (if Mom and Dad can handle it!)
- 1 ... YOU!

## Fathering Resources

*101 Secrets a Good Dad Knows* by Walter Browder & Sue Ellin Browder, 1999. Rutledge Hill Press.

*The Intentional Family* by William J. Doherty, 1997. New York: Addison Wesley.

*The Preschool Years* by Ellen Galinsky & Judy David, 1990. Ballantine Books.

## Story Time

*Dear Zoo* by Rod Campbell

*From Head to Toe* by Eric Carle

*The Snowy Day* by Ezra Jack Keats

*Green Eggs and Ham* by Dr. Seuss

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# TIPS FOR ENHANCING PHYSICAL FUN

There are many ways to enrich a child’s world and facilitate healthy physical development. Some key things that a child needs for this type of development are:

- **Variety of Activities** – Be willing to do a variety of things, from running races to playing with trucks to making some cookies with your kids.
- **Useful and Creative Toys** – Kids today often have computers, TV, etc. — but they mostly need toys that let them be creative and interactive, especially when very young.
- **Interaction with Adults and Peers** – Be active with your child — get down and play! Catch a frog. Throw a ball. Draw a picture. Kids need your physical interaction.

- **Emphasis on Guidance** – Fathers can guide children to learn as they develop physical abilities, whether learning to swim or building a block tower. Keep the focus on fun in addition to learning.

Fathers and father figures need to be careful about the expectations that they have for a child’s physical development and abilities. Too much emphasis on competition or achievement in sports can be unhealthy for young children. For example, in a culture where a sport such as soccer is played early and very competitively, a parent’s assessment of a child’s physical abilities may be linked to performance on the soccer field! Fathers and father figures should focus on being involved in the activity and its benefits rather than just on the competition.

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