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Contents
HOW TO ACHIEVE YOUR GOALS IN 10 STEPS ................................................................. 3
LIFE WITH DOWN SYNDROME – FUNCTIONAL SKILLS CONTINUE TO IMPROVE ................. 6
WHAT PARENTS AND ATHLETES NEED TO KNOW TO PREVENT YOUTH SPORTS INJURIES .......... 8
DOES WORKING ON A VERTICAL SURFACE INFLUENCE THE QUALITY OF TRACING OR COPYING? ........ 11
ACADEMIC AND PERSONAL BEHAVIORS NECESSARY FOR STUDENT SUCCESS ...................... 13
PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND WALKING IN CHILDREN WITH CEREBRAL PALSY OVER TIME ............. 15
HOW DO VISUAL-SPATIAL SKILLS INFLUENCE MATH SKILLS? .................................................. 18
PHYSICAL INACTIVITY IN YOUTH – IT STARTS YOUNGER THAN YOU THINK! .......................... 20
IMPORTANCE OF HANDWRITING FOR WRITING ........................................................................ 23
SCHOOL READINESS – ARE CHILDREN PHYSICALLY READY? ..................................................... 25
SCREEN TIME AND YOUNG CHILDREN – ARE TODAY’S CHILDREN READY FOR SCHOOL? .................. 29
EXCESSIVE SCREEN TIME FOR CHILDREN – ARE TODAY’S CHILDREN READY FOR SCHOOL? ........ 38
STICKER ACTIVITY SHEET FOR FINE MOTOR SKILL DEVELOPMENT AND STRENGTHENING ....... 42
WINTER ORAL MOTOR ACTIVITIES ............................................................................................. 44
VALENTINE GAME PRINTABLE – FREE! .................................................................................... 46
BRAIN BREAKS FOR THE CLASSROOM ..................................................................................... 49
HOW TO ACHIEVE YOUR GOALS IN 10 STEPS

Do you struggle with goal setting or wonder how to achieve your goals? Whether you have set goals for yourself or your students have set goals, it is important to follow these 10 steps to achieve the goals. Many times we have high aspirations and lofty goals especially at the start of the school year or a new year. Then when we hit one small bump in the road we give up or lower the goal.

You will find that these 10 steps can apply to anything you have set your mind to accomplish whether it be professional, academic, educational or personal goals.

How to Achieve Your Goals By Following These 10 Steps

1. Take action.
2. Try hard.
4. Explore a different way.
5. Ask someone how to do it better.
6. Do your best.
7. Learn how others did it.
8. Build upon your strengths.
9. Review and fix any mistakes.
10. Don’t give up.

Example of Following the 10 Steps to Reach Your Goals

Let’s pretend you are sick and tired of bringing paperwork home with you at the end of the day. You decide to set this professional goal: “I will document all my therapy sessions immediately following the session 100% of the time by June of 2019”.

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• Take action – document after your first session.
• Try hard – don’t make excuses.
• Keep practicing – maybe you miss a session but keep practicing to stay on top of the documentation.
• Explore a different way. – if you find it is too difficult to do, what could you do differently?
• Ask someone how to do it better. – ask a co-worker for suggestions.
• Do your best. – give it your best effort.
• Learn how others have done it. – if your coworkers can’t help, explore other options through research or online groups.
• Build upon your strengths. – if something is working (i.e. voice to text, checklists, templates, etc) see what else you could document in this manner.
• Review and fix any mistakes. – check what isn’t working and fix it.
• Don’t give up. – keep trying. Start back at step one if necessary until you reach your goal.

Self-Monitor your Progress

It can be very helpful to learn how to achieve your goals by tracking your own progress. This encourages you or your students to see that you are making changes. This allows you to take ownership of your goals and hopefully increase your internal drive. Baby steps turn into big steps and it can be beneficial to track the baby steps to keep reaching for the big steps or goals.

Encourage students to track their own progress with My Goal Tracker.

My Goal Tracker is an electronic book of data collection forms for students to track their own progress. The student can track his/her goals over time, by

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monitoring the skills over the course of a day, week, month or quarter. This allows the student to get a visual picture of improvement, decline or maintenance of different skills.

Included in this download is the following: samples of completed forms, goals setting worksheet, improvement ideas worksheet, goal tracking cards (for trials or percentage) and graphs to complete for daily, weekly, monthly or quarterly progress (number of trials out of 10, percentage or minutes). There is also one blank form for you to label if you are monitoring goals in a different manner. Complete the goal worksheet, print the necessary forms and place in a binder. The student can then graph his/her progress accordingly. By having the students track their own goals they will take ownership of their progress. It doesn’t get any easier than this to track progress. Find out more.

Self-Reflection to Reach Your Goals

Try using self-reflection to learn how to achieve your goals. It can help determine if there is a pattern meaning certain strategies seem to help more than others. Using a self-reflection journal helps you analyze your professional and personal growth. By keeping a record of your ideas, reasons, actions, techniques, and assessments you can plan for your future and facilitate a positive outcome.

Anyone can benefit from reflective journaling. Professionals can use critical thinking to improve their decision-making skills. Parents as primary teachers of children can reflect on how to foster independence and growth in themselves and their children. Students can problem solve assignments to improve academic growth.

Read more on goal setting and productivity

8 Steps to Productivity
Self Improvement to Help Achieve Goals
How to Maximize Time Spent on Goal Practice During Therapy Sessions
Participation Goals and Worksheets for Young People with Disabilities
Writing SMART Goals for School Based OT and PT
Recent research indicates that functional skills continue to improve throughout life with Down Syndrome. The American Journal of Medical Genetics published research examining the range of functional abilities found in people with Down syndrome in order to help parents and clinicians.

Survey of Life with Down Syndrome

A survey was conducted with 2658 parents from the United States and the Netherlands. The goal of the survey on life with Down Syndrome was to evaluate 11 functional skills of the parents’ sons and daughters with Down Syndrome: walking, eating, speaking, grooming/personal hygiene, reading, writing, preparing meals, working at a job, going on dates, traveling independently, and living independently.

Results of the Survey on Functional Skills Throughout Life with Down Syndrome

The results of the survey on functional skills throughout life with Down Syndrome indicated that the majority of the individuals could:
• walk by 25 months of age.
• speak reasonably well by 12 years.
• maintain their own personal hygiene by 13 years.
• work independently by 20 years.

In addition, the results indicated that by the age of 31 years old:

• 49% could read reasonably well.
• 46% could write reasonably well.
• 30% could travel independently.
• 34% were living independently.

The results from the survey indicated that parents in the Netherlands were similar to parents in the United States for most measures.

Conclusion on Life with Down Syndrome Study

The senior author of the study, Brian Skotko, stated that “contrary to some public beliefs, people with Down syndrome never stop learning, and functional skills can still be attained and improved well into adulthood.”

The researchers are hopeful that this data on functional skills throughout life with Down Syndrome will help with guidance, decision-making, and milestone information for parents and clinicians.

References


Read More of Functional Life Skills

INCORPORATING LIFE SKILLS AS PART OF A DAILY LEARNING ROUTINE
IMPORTANT INFORMATION CHILDREN SHOULD KNOW – LIFE SKILLS
LIFE SKILLS INSPIRATIONAL POSTER TO PRINT – FREE

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WHAT PARENTS AND ATHLETES NEED TO KNOW TO PREVENT YOUTH SPORTS INJURIES

If you have children who participate in sports, you know how high the injury rate is today. Many youth start sport specialization at a very young age training in one sport throughout the year. Parents and athletes NEED prevent youth sports injuries by being educated on the current best practices.

Research on How to Prevent Youth Sports Injuries and Sports Specialization

There are approximately 3 to 5 million young athletes participating in sport-related activities. All of these young athletes are at risk for sports injuries and the rate of injury is on the rise. This could be due to several factors such as: more intense practices, increase in game schedules, participation in multiple same sport leagues, scholarship opportunities, and pressure to perform.

When athletes specialize in one sport, the injury rate increases. Recent research indicates that when compared to athletes who played a wide variety of sports, youth who specialized in one sport were 81 percent more likely to experience an overuse injury.
Recommendations to Prevent Youth Sports Injuries

Current research recommends to prevent youth sports injuries follow these guidelines:

- young athletes should avoid early sports specialization until puberty.
- the number of hours of vigorous sports activity per week should probably correlate to the athlete’s age. For example, if the child is 12 years old, then the child should participate in 12 or fewer hours of vigorous sports during the week.
- short breaks from specific sports are beneficial to allow overuse injuries to repair. This can be especially helpful for female athletes who will have time to gain weight, experience menstrual cycles, and possibly grow in stature.
- young athletes should train no more than 5 days per week on one specific sport.
- take off 2 to 4 months per year consecutively from the specific sport (dependent upon the sport and the position).
- under supervision, resistance training can be a safe and effective type of exercise for prepubertal children and adolescent young athletes.
- resistance training and endurance activities should be well balanced.
- lifting light weights with high repetitions is the safest.
- avoid ballistic or maximal lifting.
Download an Evidence Based Handout on How to Prevent Youth Sports Injuries

Would you like to have this information in a handout to provide to your coaches, parents and young athletes? Sign up here to get the one page PDF handout on how to prevent youth sports injuries.

References:


Ertz, C. Does sports specialization lead to increased injury rates in youth? Retrieved from the web on 1/9/19 at https://notes.childrenshospital.org/sports-specialization-increased-injury-rates-youth/


DOES WORKING ON A VERTICAL SURFACE INFLUENCE THE QUALITY OF TRACING OR COPYING?

As pediatric therapists, we often recommend that students work on vertical surfaces such as a wall, easel or slant board to encourage an increase in wrist extension, elbow and shoulder stability, and upright posture. By modifying the environment by moving tracing, copying, drawing, writing or play to vertical surfaces, you change the muscles that are activated in the body. Researchers recently carried out a study to determine if the quality or performance level was affected when you go from working on a horizontal to a vertical surface.

Research on Muscle Activation and Performance Levels on Vertical Surfaces

The American Journal of Occupational Therapy published research comparing performance level and muscle activity patterns during shape copying and tracing in two positions while sitting at a desk (horizontal surface) and while standing in front of a wall (vertical surface), between 22 typically developing preschool children and 13 children with mild disabilities.

Results of the Study

The researchers determined the following:

- children performed faster and smoother movements when copying shapes on the vertical surface.
- there was no reduction of accuracy when working on the vertical surface compared to working on the horizontal surface.
• the children with mild disabilities exerted their upper trapezius muscles while performing the short tasks on the vertical surface compared with their muscle activity on the horizontal surface.

Conclusion

The researchers concluded that short copying or drawing tasks on a vertical surface may help to increase the control of proximal muscles and help with graphomotor performance in children with mild disabilities.

More Resources about Working on a Vertical Surface

SUPER EASY PLAY IDEAS ON A VERTICAL SURFACE COMPARING TRACING AND COPYING IN SITTING AND STANDING

10 FUN ACTIVITIES FOR KIDS TO WORK ON SHOULDER STRENGTHENING

Fading Lines and Shapes – includes worksheets that gradually increase in visual motor difficulty while decreasing visual input for line and shape formation. There are 18 worksheets for line formations ie horizontal, vertical, curves, waves, diagonals, spikes and combinations. There are 9 worksheets for shape formations ie circle, cross, square, rectangle, X, triangle, diamond, oval and heart. This download is great for push in therapy, therapy homework or consultation services in the classroom.

Fading Lines and Shapes encourages:

• pre-writing practice
• shape formation
• visual motor skills

Find out more about Fading Lines and Shapes.

Reference:


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ACADEMIC AND PERSONAL BEHAVIORS NECESSARY FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

There are many academic and personal behaviors necessary for student success that teachers instill in their students. Doing well in school is not all about good grades. Students need foundational skills in order to be successful students. Some examples are persistence, engagement, work habits, organizational skills, communication, collaboration, and self-regulation.

Persistence

Persistence is one of several academic and personal behaviors necessary for student success. Students need to be committed to school, work toward goals, and finish difficult tasks. Teachers help students to develop persistence by creating a culture for learning, rewarding effort, encouraging goal setting and offering opportunities to correct mistakes.

Engagement

Students need to feel connected to the educational process by being involved in school activities, making friendships and communicating with teachers. When students are engaged learners, they are motivated to do well. Teachers help support student engagement by valuing effort, rewarding academic skills and listening to their students.

Work Habits and Organizational Skills

Two more academic and personal behaviors necessary for student success are work habits and organizational skills. Students need to learn the skills to: work independently, be organized, manage time effectively, and self-assess. Teachers help by teaching time management skills, using planners, encouraging productivity, and effective note-taking strategies.

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Communication and Collaboration Skills

When students practice appropriate communication and collaboration skills, they are learning not only to improve their academic success but to improve their social skills and future employment opportunities in the future. It is important to learn how to ask for help when needed, to take turns, to express your knowledge and to work with others. Teachers can support these skills by providing opportunities for students to collaborate (i.e. group projects) and to offer one on one support when needed.

Self-Regulation Skills

Research indicates that self-regulation in children can be a predictor of academic achievement and behavioral responses. Students with good self-regulation are resilient. They have developed coping skills, self-control, problem-solving skills, and the ability to keep trying even though something is challenging. Teachers help to support the development of self-regulation skills by creating a learning environment that: is respectful, encourages positive behaviors, teaches problem-solving skills, and values appropriate student behavior. Read more on self-regulation here.

How Can Students Practice These Academic and Personal Behaviors Necessary for Student Success?

It is important that students and teachers are always working on persistence, engagement, work habits, communication, and self-regulation skills. These are skills that require growth over time. Encourage students to use the Self-Assessments and Checklists for Good Work Habits to gain independence with these skills.

Help your students become independent, motivated, organized, persistent, and engaged learners with the Self-Assessments and Checklists for Good Work Habits.
A recent study in *Disability and Rehabilitation* examined physical activity and walking in children with cerebral palsy over time. The goal of the study was to create developmental trajectories for physical activity and walking performance for children with cerebral palsy.

**Methodology**

The study included 79 children with cerebral palsy (Gross Motor Functional Classification System – GMFCS levels I–V). The average age of the participants was 7.6 years old. Each participant across GMFCS levels I–V wore an Actigraph to record physical activity. In addition, the children with GMFCS levels I-II also wore a StepWatch to measure walking performance.

Developmental trajectories for average physical activity counts/minute and the number of minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity were generated for levels I, II, and III/IV/V(combined). Single leg strides/day and average strides faster than 30 strides/min trajectories were generated for GMFCS levels I–II.

**Results of the Study on Physical Activity and Walking in Children with Cerebral Palsy Over Time**

The results of the study on physical activity and walking in children with cerebral palsy over time indicated the following:

- the children with cerebral palsy did NOT display plateaus in physical activity or walking performance based on functional level.
- the children with cerebral palsy across all levels showed a decrease in the amount and intensity of physical activity from 3.0 to 12 years old.
• GMFCS level I participants demonstrated the steepest decline in the amount and intensity of physical activity from 3.0 to 12 years old.
• children in GMFCS level I decreased slightly in walking performance measures from 3.0 to 12 years old.
• children in GMFCS level II increased slightly in walking performance measures from 3.0 to 12 years old.

Conclusion
The researchers concluded that physical activity and walking performance in children with cerebral palsy varies over time based on functional levels. This information is helpful to guide physical activity and walking interventions for therapists and families.

Additional Research on Physical Activity and Walking in Children with Cerebral Palsy Over Time
Additional research indicated that the development of motor performance continues for years in individuals with cerebral palsy even after gross motor capacity limits are reached.

Daily activities continue to develop for individuals without intellectual disability into their 20s.

Individuals who are severely affected have the least favorable development of motor performance, and those with intellectual disability have the least favorable development of daily activity performance.

Since the research indicated that there is ongoing development of daily activities, routine monitoring of individuals with cerebral palsy for activity limitations should be carried out into adulthood.

References:
References (continued):

**Teaching Motor Skills to Children with Cerebral Palsy and Similar Movement Disorders:** The ELECTRONIC version of *Teaching Motor Skills* is a must-have reference for all therapists who work with children with cerebral palsy. Whether you are a beginner or experienced therapist you will find the information concise, informative and very helpful to carry out everyday functional tasks including stretching with children with cerebral palsy. The book provides activity suggestions throughout the developmental sequence such as head control, tummy time, sitting, transitions, walking and beyond. There is also great information that reviews additional interventions for children with cerebral palsy such as bracing, surgical and medical management. The author, Sieglinde Martin, is an experienced PT and a mother of a child with cerebral palsy. [FIND OUT MORE.](#)

**Therapeutic Play Activities for Children** digital download includes 100 play activity pages and 12 tip sheets. The play activities encourage the development of fine motor skills, bimanual skills, rolling, crawling, tall kneeling, standing balance and cruising with a strong focus on children with cerebral palsy. [FIND OUT MORE INFORMATION.](#)
HOW DO VISUAL-SPATIAL SKILLS INFLUENCE MATH SKILLS?

Did you know that a student’s visual-spatial skills influence math skills? Visual-spatial skills provide us with the ability to visually perceive two or more objects in relation to each other and to yourself. Visual spatial relationships are important in everyday tasks. You need to interpret what it means to “stand first in a line”, “sit in front of Johnny” or “put the pencil on top of the paper”. If you have difficulty perceiving spatial relationships it can effect your motor skills, body awareness, problem solving, activities of daily living and your overall performance in school. Researchers are also finding that visual spatial skills influence math skills.

Theories on Visual-Spatial Skills and Math

Researchers hypothesize that mathematical thinking is supported by spatial representation. In order for children to solve math problems, they use strategies that involve mental number lines, geometric figures, and information about locations in space. People who use spatial representation (including spatial relationships) in math problems are more likely to get those problems correct.

Visual-spatial working memory is the ability to hold the locations of different objects, landmarks etc. in working memory. This skill has been shown to be beneficial when solving addition problems that require carrying. One theory indicates that visual-spatial working memory is a foundational cognitive skill for supporting early numeracy knowledge, which then supports later math achievement.

Evidence on Visual-Spatial Skills Influence on Math Skills

There is a significant amount of evidence that supports the notion that visual spatial skills are linked to individual differences in math abilities. Children who have better spatial skills when compared to their peers have better math skills.
Visual-spatial working memory, form perception, and spatial visualization are all have been shown to be predictors of math skills in school-aged children. In addition, before school-age, spatial assembly skill has been shown to be predictive of math skills. Even at the infant level, visual-spatial skills can predict math abilities at age 4. One study showed that visual-spatial skills at age 3 were predictive of math knowledge even two years later after controlling for earlier math knowledge and executive function skills. Visual-spatial working memory at age 4.5 was also able to predict math achievement through Grade 3.

Another preschool study indicated that patterning and spatial skills predicted math knowledge at the beginning and end of preschool. The researchers recommended that standards for early math should include pattern and spatial skills.

**Does Working on Visual-Spatial Skills Improve Math Skills?**

The evidence is mixed on whether working on spatial skills leads to improvements in math knowledge. There are three studies that did indicate that improving visual-spatial skills in children resulted in increased performance on math assessments although 2 other studies did not see a difference in math skills.

Researchers recommend that children experience playing with blocks, puzzles, video games and other spatial materials to help develop their spatial skills. Through scaffolding teachers and parents can help by using techniques such as teacher-guided block play in which children are asked to build structures with specific constraints and are asked to change their designs in specific ways.

**Resources to Improve Visual-Spatial Skills**

- Right or Left Games – Practice Right Left Discrimination
- Move Like Me
- Personal Space Journey
- Which Way?
- Follow the Path
- Visual-Spatial Mazes
- Left and Right Worksheets

PHYSICAL INACTIVITY IN YOUTH – IT STARTS YOUNGER THAN YOU THINK!

The statistics are frightening for the future health of our young people. While schools are fretting over academic achievement to increase brain power, physical inactivity in youth is on the rise.

Think about your average elementary school students 30 years ago – many walked to school, had outdoor recess 2-3 times per day, walked home and played outside until dinner. Now consider our current elementary school students – take a bus to school, maybe get recess one time per day, maybe an after-school activity and then screen time until dinner.

This change of physical inactivity in youth is starting younger than researchers previously thought.

Research on Physical Inactivity in Youth

Researchers were already aware that physical inactivity in youth begins to increase during childhood and adolescence. A recent study took a closer look at the physical activity and sedentary behavior of 600 children who wore physical activity trackers at the ages of 6, 8, and 11 years, resulting in 1254 observations.

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Following data analysis on the tracking of physical inactivity in youth the following was determined:

- total physical activity revealed a significant decline with age resulting in a change of total physical activity of a decrease in 75.3 minutes per day from 6 to 11 years.
- light physical activity declined by 44.6 minutes per day.
- moderate to vigorous physical activity declined by an overall 30.7 minutes.
- sedentary behavior increased significantly with an increase of 107 minutes.
- boys showed a steeper decline in both light and moderate to vigorous physical activity than girls.
- higher fat mass index and BMI z scores were associated with lower levels of total physical activity, moderate to vigorous physical activity and higher levels of sedentary behavior.
- increased sedentary behavior was measured during school hours.
- there was a distinct decline in physical activity on weekends, out-of-school days, and during lunchtime.

**Conclusion on Physical Inactivity in Youth**

The researchers concluded that physical activity decreased, and sedentary behavior in children increased in earlier years than previously thought. Specifically, moderate to vigorous physical activity remained relatively stable until 8 years, but revealed a drop-off at 11 years. This age range of 8-11 years old is a critical period to intervene to help prevent this decline in physical activity in children.

Why is it so important to intervene at a younger age? Physical activity shows a consistent decline as we get older. If we start children at a higher level of physical activity to overall result will be great physical activity as adults which benefits overall physical and mental health.

**Reference:**

5 Resources to Help Decrease Sedentary Behavior in the Classroom

Here are some resources that encourage movement and learning:

1. **The ABC’s of Movement®- Combine Movement with Literacy** – The ABC’s of Movement® is a pdf document of educational flash cards that combine movement with literacy development. Kids love these colorful flash cards that merge learning the alphabet with twenty six fun, noncompetitive movement activities. Designed for children of all abilities from preschool through 2nd grade, these flash cards were developed by a physical therapist with learning and physical development in mind. Ideal for home and school use. These bright, bold letters and full-color photographs of children make learning easy and fun!

2. **Movement Flashcards** – Movement Flashcards digital download includes 10 aerobic exercises with flashcards templates. Students can get physical activity while reviewing material. The 10 aerobic activities include: run in place, jumping, hopping, squats, lunges, skipping, twists, cross crawls, jumping jacks and marching. Each page includes a picture image of the aerobic exercise along with a blank template to type in 18 flashcards. You choose what to work on for academic material.

3. **The ABC’s of Active Learning** – Exploring educational concepts through movement and multiple senses give children opportunities to learn in ways they understand. The alphabet activities from A to Z are a collection of activities that can be used with children of all abilities.

4. **Mini Movement Breaks** – This download is a collection of 60+ quick sensory-motor activity cards. The mini-movement breaks are quick and require no equipment. The movement breaks can be done indoors. Most of the movement breaks can be done with one child or a group of children. It does not get any easier than this to encourage sensory motor activities in the classroom or home.

5. **Classroom Activity Posters** – download is a collection of 16 exercise activities, 4 large posters and a brief, simple video demonstration of each exercise. The posters are divided into four groups: posture, alerting, ready to work and focus/balance. All of the exercises are performed in standing. Try these activities prior to starting fine motor activities, for posture breaks, to refocus students attention and for vestibular/proprioceptive input in the classroom.
Handwriting practice has diminished significantly over the several decades. Recently, more and more research indicates the importance of handwriting skills for literacy, working memory, orthographic processing and more. The Journal of Educational Psychology published research on the importance of handwriting for writing.

Handwriting is very different from writing. In general, the act of handwriting involves forming legible letters with proper spacing in a reasonable amount of time. Whereas the act of writing requires you to communicate the ideas in your brain onto paper or a computer. Both tasks work hand in hand (no pun intended) to formulate and express your thoughts and ideas.

**Study on the Importance of Handwriting for Writing**

The recent study on the importance of handwriting for writing included first-grade children who were identified as having handwriting and writing difficulties. The children in the experimental group participated in 27 fifteen minute sessions that focused on improving the accuracy and fluency of their handwriting. The control group received instruction in phonological awareness.
Results of the Study on the Importance of Handwriting for Writing

The researchers determined that:

- students in the handwriting condition made greater gains when compared to the control group in handwriting as well as compositional fluency immediately following instruction.
- the gains were still present 6 months later.
- the effects of instruction were similar for students with and without an identified disability.

The researchers concluded that handwriting is causally related to writing. It is important to provide explicit and supplemental handwriting instruction in order to prevent writing difficulties in the primary grades.


Handwriting Resources

This Handwriting Bundle for PreK-5th Graders is created by school-based Occupational Therapist, Thia Triggs of Print Path. This Handwriting Without Tears®-style letter font, uses 3-lines to best support your students. There are Go-Dots, Gray-Boxes, and Simple Arrows that inform rather than confuse learners. Best practices include research-based methods incorporating application of developmental and motor learning theories to benefit your struggling learners.

Do you receive referral after referral for students with handwriting concerns? Are the teachers you work with feeling frustrated and overwhelmed with so little time to offer handwriting practice? This Handwriting Station Bundle Deal will save you TONS of time with these NO-PREP activities that encourage handwriting practice for your students. Set up a handwriting station in the classroom or at home so students can practice handwriting throughout the day in the classroom. Great for early finishers!

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Have you noticed a recent decline in children’s functional skills at school? When it comes to school readiness are children physically ready?

A recent study indicated that about 30% of children’s physical development was ‘of concern’ at the start of the school year (21% had significant movement difficulty and another 8% exhibited physical development below age expectancy). Teachers believed that 96% of young children in recent years presented with a decline in physical development at the start school.

Today, the sedentary lifestyle starts at birth with “bucket babies” who move from one piece of baby equipment to another. As children get older, there is an increase in screen time and lack of physical activity. All of this lack of movement leads to a decrease in open-ended, physically active play. This type of play is crucial for children to develop the muscle strength and coordination to complete school tasks such as sitting upright, writing, navigating the school, and participating in physical education class.

What Affects School Readiness?

Many factors affect school readiness. Information on early brain and child development indicate that factors in a child’s early experience can greatly affect
that child’s learning trajectory. The factors that influence children’s school success includes social, emotional, cognitive and physical development.

A recent article discussed the benefits of waiting to start kindergarten. The research indicates that by waiting to start school may have academic and social advantages while in kindergarten. Although those advantages can dissipate by middle school. Gender can also influence school readiness.

In terms of physical development, playtime outdoors and indoors is critical. This helps children develop the small muscles in the hands for fine motor skills such as coloring, drawing, and writing. In addition, children develop the larger muscles in the shoulder and core muscles which are necessary to maintain stability in the body while children learn.

When children are able to complete age-appropriate fine and gross motor skills, they are able to more easily sit upright, self-regulate and focus their attention on learning versus controlling their body.

**Why Are We Discussing School Readiness Now?**

You may wonder why are we discussing school readiness in January? For two reasons:

1. In order to prepare children physically for school they need TIME to build up their muscles and coordination. Therefore they need TIME to play. Starting in September when school starts in the United States will not get them ready.
2. In other parts of the World (i.e. Australia) school starts in January. Many motor skill activities can be infused throughout the school day. This can help children catch up on their physical development during the early school years.

**What Can You Do To Help Children Be Physically Ready for School?**

The number one suggestion for school readiness is to start as early as possible (BIRTH). Provide children with safe spaces for open-ended play opportunities that include movement. As children get older, include daily outdoor play (weather dependent) for gross motor skill development and physical activity.
Children are best able to build strength and coordination through spontaneous
and unstructured play. Movement and exposure to nature are two CRITICAL
factors needed for healthy child development.

Young children need to spend two to three hours each day in active play. This
allows children to receive adequate sensory stimulation for the development of
their vestibular, proprioceptive and tactile systems. When less time is available
due to an increase in screen time or a sedentary lifestyle, children can struggle to
physically cope with the demands of the school day.

**Get Fit for School**

Webinar Presented by: Ingrid C. King MScOT, BOT

Learn how to use a play-based approach to help children get physically ready for school

**What to Do If You Suspect a Child is Not Physically Ready for School?**

When children are not physically ready for school it can be hard to spot right
away. Sometimes, you may notice they are squirming excessively, fidgeting,
impulsive, tired, etc. Other times they may move quickly and be unable to control
their movements. These subtle or not so subtle signs can be difficult to interpret.

Identification can be particularly challenging in the unstructured play
environments in an early childhood setting. Children may be avoiding things they
find difficult.

Valuable play opportunities to focus on required skills are lost. Without well-
trained eyes, these children may slip through the cracks at an age where they
can make the most improvements. Between **four and six years of age there is a critical window for the development of fine motor skills.**

**Create Opportunities for Exercise Play**

Be sure to create opportunities for exercise play. Children need to move and they
need to move and practice these skills over and over again. Muscle strength
improves with repetition from playing for extended periods of time. Provide time
for open-ended play where children are climbing, riding, running and jumping.
Activities that target the core muscles in the shoulders and trunk are highly beneficial. Examples of these types of activities are animal walks, swimming, and tug of war.

Occupational and Physical Therapists who work with children are ideally suited to help children who may be at risk. They can identify concerns early and provide interventions for under developed motor skills.

Once children improve their core and upper body strength, they find being active indoors and outdoors easier and more enjoyable. Their gross motor skills and endurance improve increasing motivational levels and tolerance for active play. Not to mention, the improvements in the ability to sit upright and pay attention. This helps children to develop the foundational skills for drawing, writing, cutting with scissors and various other school tasks that children need to do with their hands and fingers.

Need More Help to Physically Prepare Children for School?

The [Get Fit for School webinar](#) entitled “Popcorn and Animals Make My Muscles Strong!” can help educate parents, teachers, and therapists on how we can effectively prepare children physically for success at school!

The instructor, Ingrid C. King MScOT, BOT, developed this webinar to teach you how to use a play-based approach to help children get fit for school.

Therapists, teachers, and parents can learn to help young children with the [Get Fit for School webinar](#) because in just 75 minutes it will teach you how to prepare children physically for success at school through a play-based approach! [FIND OUT MORE](#).
SCREEN TIME AND YOUNG CHILDREN – ARE TODAY’S CHILDREN READY FOR SCHOOL?

For the past two months, we asked professionals and parents questions about screen time and young children in order to determine if today’s children are physically ready for school.

Children’s readiness for school, according to the National Education Goals Panel, consists of the following elements: physical health and motor development, social and emotional development, approaches to learning, language development, and cognition and general knowledge.

The results of the survey indicate that an overwhelming majority of professionals and parents agree that screen time is negatively affecting a child’s ability to be ready for school.

Current Stats on Screen Time and Young Children

When you take a look at the current stats on screen time and young children, it is alarming. Today, about 29% of babies (YES babies) under the age of 1 are

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watching TV and videos for an average of about 90 minutes. Even 23% of babies (YES babies) have televisions in their bedrooms.

As babies transition between their first and second birthdays, now 64% of babies and toddlers are watching TV and videos slightly over 2 hours per day. In this age range of 1-2 years old, 36% have a television in their bedroom. Time with screens increases rapidly in the early years.

When children hit the preschool years, the trend continues. Research indicates that children between the ages of 2 and 5 years old, interact with screens anywhere from 2.2 hours per day to 7 hours per day.

When you consider screen time and young children on a daily basis, you quickly realize that children may be missing out on important practice time for key developmental skills.

Questions from the Survey on Screen Time and Young Children

We asked two questions in the survey on screen time and young children. There were 520 responses to the survey. Question #1 was What is your title? Participants could choose from:

- Parent
- Teacher
- Occupational Therapist
- Occupational Therapy Assistant
- Physical Therapist
- Physical Therapy Assistant
- Speech and Language Pathologist
- Counselor
- Other

Question #2 was on screen time and young children. Eight statements were provided regarding screen time and the affects on young children with options to answer: Strongly Agree, Agree, No Opinion, Disagree and Strongly Disagree.

Screen Time and Young Children – What Professionals and Parents Think

Five hundred twenty survey responses on screen time and young children were collected from 295 Occupational Therapists and Occupational Therapy Assistants, 73 parents, 50 Physical Therapists and Physical Therapy Assistants,
Screen Time and Young Children – Physical Health

When asked to respond with Strongly Agree, Agree, No Opinion, Disagree and Strongly Disagree to the statement: *Screen time negatively affects physical health* the following results were recorded:

- 93% strongly agreed or agreed that screen time negatively affects physical health.
- 3% disagreed or strongly disagreed that screen time negatively affects physical health.

Screen Time and Young Children – Fine Motor Development

When asked to respond with Strongly Agree, Agree, No Opinion, Disagree and Strongly Disagree to the statement: *Screen time negatively affects fine motor development* the following results were recorded:

- 89% strongly agreed or agreed that screen time negatively affects fine motor development.
- 7% disagreed or strongly disagreed that screen time negatively affects fine motor development.
When asked to respond with Strongly Agree, Agree, No Opinion, Disagree and Strongly Disagree to the statement: *Screen time negatively affects gross motor development* the following results were recorded:

- 93% strongly agreed or agreed that screen time negatively affects gross motor development.
- 5% disagreed or strongly disagreed that screen time negatively affects gross motor development.
Screen Time and Young Children – Social Development

When asked to respond with Strongly Agree, Agree, No Opinion, Disagree and Strongly Disagree to the statement: *Screen time negatively affects social development* the following results were recorded:

- 92% strongly agree or agree that screen time negatively affects social development.
- 4% disagree or strongly disagree that screen time negatively affects social development.

![Graph showing the distribution of responses to the social development question.]

Screen Time and Young Children – A Child’s Approach to Learning

When asked to respond with Strongly Agree, Agree, No Opinion, Disagree and Strongly Disagree to the statement: *Screen time negatively affects a child’s approach to learning* the following results were recorded:

- 76% strongly agreed or agreed that screen time negatively affects a child’s approach to learning.
- 13% had no opinion.
- 10% disagreed or strongly disagreed that screen time negatively affects a child’s approach to learning.

![Graph showing the distribution of responses to the child’s learning question.]

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Screen Time and Young Children – Emotional Development

When asked to respond with Strongly Agree, Agree, No Opinion, Disagree and Strongly Disagree to the statement: Screen time negatively affects emotional development the following results were recorded:

- 85% strongly agreed or agreed that screen time negatively affects emotional development.
- 8% had no opinion.
- 6% disagreed or strongly disagreed that screen time negatively affects emotional development.

Screen Time and Young Children – Language Development

When asked to respond with Strongly Agree, Agree, No Opinion, Disagree and Strongly Disagree to the statement: Screen time negatively affects language development the following results were recorded:

- 73% strongly agreed or agreed that screen time negatively affects language development.
- 9% had no opinion
- 6% disagreed or strongly disagreed that screen time negatively affects language development.
Screen Time and Young Children – Cognition and General Knowledge

When asked to respond with Strongly Agree, Agree, No Opinion, Disagree and Strongly Disagree to the statement: Screen time negatively affects cognition and general knowledge the following results were recorded:

- 65% strongly agreed or agreed that screen time negatively affects cognition and general knowledge.
- 17% had no opinion.
- 18% disagreed or strongly disagreed that screen time negatively affects cognition and general knowledge.

Research about Screen Time and Young Children

So if the overwhelming majority of professionals and parents agree that screen time is negatively affecting a child’s ability to be ready for school, does the research back up their opinions? The answer is YES. Excessive screen time can be detrimental to many aspects of childhood development.

Obesity, Overall Health and Screen Time

Increased screen time is a risk factor for childhood obesity, increased BMI and increased food intake in both low-risk and high-risk populations. Take a look at this fact: for each hour of television viewing per day, children consume an additional 167 calories! Makes sense right? Adults tend to snack when watching tv too!

Even if you think playing active video games will combat the risk, think again. Children who own active video games like the Wii do not show an increase in physical activity.

Screen time can even disrupt sleep patterns in little ones. In children under 3 years old, screen time is linked to irregular sleep patterns.
Screen Time and Learning

Did you know that children who spend less time watching television in the early years, have a greater chance of doing better in school, are more physically active, and are better able to engage in schoolwork in later elementary school?

Research indicates that more than two hours of recreational screen time in children was associated with poorer cognitive development. A study on language development indicated that each additional 30 minutes of hand-held screen time was linked to a 49 percent increased risk in expressive speech delay.

When young children spend too much time on screens that limit their time to participate in regular play routines. Research indicates that the more time preschool children spend with screens, the less time they spend engaged in creative play, constructive problem solving, and creativity. Also, when they are interacting with screens they are NOT interacting with other people like their peers or parents which is crucial for learning social and emotional skills.

For toddlers, higher levels of early exposure to screen time has been associated with problems in later childhood, including lower math and school achievement, reduced physical activity, and victimization by classmates.

Gross motor skill development may also be influenced by screen time. One study indicated an adverse influence on screen time at 4 and 5 years old on motor proficiency at 7 years old.

What can you do to help reduce the negative affects of screen time on young children?

The most important step is to follow the American Academy of Pediatrics recommendations for screen time in young children. The recommendations are as follows:

- For children younger than 18 months, avoid the use of screen media other than video-chatting.

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- Parents of children 18 to 24 months of age who want to introduce digital media should choose high-quality programming, and watch it with their children to help them understand what they’re seeing.
- For children ages 2 to 5 years, limit screen use to 1 hour per day of high-quality programs. Parents should co-view media with children to help them understand what they are seeing and apply it to the world around them.
- For children ages 6 and older, place consistent limits on the time spent using media, and the types of media, and make sure media does not take the place of adequate sleep, physical activity and other behaviors essential to health.

Parents and professionals need to set a good example as well. Children model what they see. If you want children to reduce their screen time, reduce your own screen time as well.

Be sure to provide children with ample opportunities for open-ended, active play to help children to develop skills necessary for when they start school.

**Want to learn even more on how to help young children develop the skills necessary for school?**

The [Get Fit for School](#) webinar entitled “Popcorn and Animals Make My Muscles Strong!” can help educate parents, teachers, and therapists on how we can effectively prepare children physically for success at school!

The instructor, Ingrid C. King MScOT, BOT, developed this webinar to teach you how to use a play-based approach to help children get fit for school.

**References:**


EXCESSIVE SCREEN TIME FOR CHILDREN – WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH SAY?

What does the research say about excessive screen time for children?
Yesterday, we reported the survey results on screen time and young children. The overwhelming majority of professionals and parents agreed that screen time is negatively affecting a child’s ability to be ready for school. This week, *JAMA Pediatrics*, published a large study on the effects of excessive screen time and children.

As parents we may avoid this topic. Handing our children screens makes parenting so much easier. Sometimes we justify it by providing educational apps or educational television shows, but the bottom line is more research indicates that excessive screen time is detrimental to the developing brain.

**The Methodology of the Recent Study on Excessive Screen Time and Children**

The longitudinal study was to determine the directional association between screen time and child development in a population of 2441 mothers and children (47.9% boys) in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. Data was collected by maternal report.

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and was analyzed at age 24, 36, and 60 months. It included the children’s screen time behavior (total hours per week) and developmental outcomes (Ages and Stages Questionnaire, Third Edition).

**Results of the Recent Study on Excessive Screen Time and Children**

After data analysis the researchers determined the following:

- Children were viewing screens for an average of 17.09 hours per week at 24 months, 24.99 hours per week at 36 months, and 10.85 hours per week at 60 months.
- **Higher levels of screen time at 24 and 36 months were significantly associated with poorer performance on developmental screening tests at 36 months and 60 months.**

One might ask the question – what comes first, excessive screen time or development delays?

The researchers determined that that screen time is likely the initial factor. This is because greater screen time at 24 months was associated with poorer performance on developmental screening tests at 36 months. Then moving forward, greater screen time at 36 months was associated with lower scores on developmental screening tests at 60 months. The researchers did not report the opposite association.

**Conclusion about Excessive Screen Time and Children**

The researchers concluded that higher levels of screen time were associated with poor performance on a screening measure assessing children’s achievement of development milestones. When young children are observing screens, they are missing important opportunities to practice and achieve social, motor, and communication skills. This is EXACTLY what 520 professionals and parents agreed upon in our recent survey.
Suggestions to Reduce Excessive Screen Time in Children

The most important step is to follow the American Academy of Pediatrics recommendations for screen time in young children. The recommendations are as follows:

- **For children younger than 18 months, avoid the use of screen media other than video-chatting.**
- **Parents of children 18 to 24 months of age who want to introduce digital media should choose high-quality programming, and watch it with their children to help them understand what they’re seeing.**
- **For children ages 2 to 5 years, limit screen use to 1 hour per day of high-quality programs. Parents should co-view media with children to help them understand what they are seeing and apply it to the world around them.**
- **For children ages 6 and older, place consistent limits on the time spent using media, and the types of media, and make sure media does not take the place of adequate sleep, physical activity and other behaviors essential to health.**

Parents and professionals need to set a good example as well. Children model what they see. If you want children to reduce their screen time, reduce your own screen time as well.

Be sure to provide children with ample opportunities for open-ended, active play to help young children achieve optimal developmental skills.

**Suggestion: Create a Family Media Plan**

Work with families to help develop personalized media plans to ensure that screen time is not excessive or interfering with face-to-face interactions or family time. Parents are overworked and stressed, in today’s fast-paced society. Sometimes tossing a screen in front of a child is all that we can muster up the energy for.

If you create media plans it can offer guidance for families on:

- establishing rules regarding media use based on a child’s age.
- how to determine screen-free zones and times.

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• how to make time for offline activities to ensure that physical activity and family interactions are a priority.
• suggestions for easy to set up activities or experiences for offline time.


Need specific activity suggestions to reduce excessive screen time?

Play – Move – Develop: 100 reproducible games and activity ideas to encourage motor skill development and learning in children. A great resource for fun, home exercise program activities.

Not sure what developmental skills to expect in young children?

The Infant and Toddler Handbook, written by Lauren Drobnjak PT and Claire Heffron MS, OTR/L, is a 30-page downloadable ebook packed with reader-friendly information about the developmental motor milestones you can expect in kids ages 0 through 5. The second half of the book is full of development-boosting fine motor, gross motor, and sensory activities divided by age range so you can find exactly what you're looking for depending on the ages of the kids in your therapy practice, classroom, or home. FIND OUT MORE.
STICKER ACTIVITY SHEET FOR FINE MOTOR SKILL DEVELOPMENT AND STRENGTHENING

This sticker activity sheet for fine motor skill development is super cute, hand-drawn and you can download and print it for FREE!

Do you need a new activity to engage students to work on the muscles and fine motor skills needed for handwriting? This fine motor development sticker challenge is perfect.

The object of the sticker activity sheet is to complete the pictures on the page with the small stickers. I love the hand-drawn creative images created by school-based Occupational Therapist, Jennifer Dodge.

Another fantastic way to use these is using Q-tips dipped in paint to dab on the dots or to practice drawing small circles.

You may have used other materials created by her such as the Pencil Obstacles Courses #1, Pencil Obstacles Courses #2 and Poke Pictures. If you have any students who are difficult to motivate or who benefit from the novelty factory you will want to check out the unique nature of her hand-drawn designs that make her activities one of a kind!

Benefits of the Sticker Activity Sheet Freebie

This sticker activity sheet helps children to practice:

- fine pincer grasp
- thumb-index stability
- “shift” movements
- stability through the “power” side of the hand
- wrist extension
- stabilizing on the side of the hand
- hand-eye coordination

Watch the Sticker Activity Sheet in Action

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Check out this video of a young student completing the sticker activity sheet.

**Mini Sticker Dot Challenge Packet**

This freebie is from the complete [Mini Sticker Dot Challenge packet](#). If you are looking for a new, fun occupational therapy designed activity for elementary-aged children to work on fine motor-visual development (and some math objectives) while having fun, then these unique, hand-drawn, Mini Sticker Dot Challenges are awesome! This activity packet was created by school-based Occupational Therapist, Jennifer Dodge. [FIND OUT MORE.](#)

![Mini Sticker Dot Challenges](image)

**Download your FREE Sticker Activity Sheet**

You can download your FREE [sticker activity sheet for fine motor skill development here.](#)

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WINTER ORAL MOTOR ACTIVITIES

Winter oral motor activities can be fun indoor play during these cold months to work on strengthening the muscles in and around the mouth such as your cheeks, jaw, tongue, and lips. By practicing and strengthening oral motor skills, it may help children to improve their feeding skills, arousal level and more.

Winter Oral Motor Activities – Ideas and Free Printables

Here are a few Winter themed oral motor activities that children may enjoy to help with feeding and sensory input.

Frozen Oral Motor Craft

Download this FREE template to create your own Frozen artwork using oral motor skills, watercolor paints, a straw, and the template.

Snowstorm Oral Motor Craftivity

Download the snowman printables for this fine motor and oral motor craft activity. Watch the snowstorm in action in the video action below.

Penguin Ice Races

Try some ice penguin races on a cookie sheet. No penguin ice cube trays? Just use regular ice!

Snowball Transfer Game

Grab some cotton balls, straws and two buckets. Start playing!

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Penguin Fish Feeding

I love to create games out of recycled items for kids. This one is adorable. Use a straw to encourage oral motor skills or grab some tongs and add in fine motor skills.

Ice Cube Races

Water, ice, tub, and a straw is all you need for this fun game! When the kids get tired of the oral motor exercises, use it for an open ended sensory bin.

Need more oral motor exercise ideas?

All students can benefits from breathing breaks to provide oral input, mindfulness and a calm body.

Breathing Breaks: This digital download is a collection of 16 deep breathing exercises and 3 tip sheets. Deep breathing exercises can help to decrease stress, reduce anxiety, remain calm, strengthen sustained attention, sharpen the ability to learn and more! This packet includes 16 full page breathing exercises and 3 tips sheets in color or black and white. In addition, the breathing exercises are provided 4 to a page to make smaller cards or booklets. FIND OUT MORE INFORMATION.
VALENTINE GAME PRINTABLE – FREE!

Do you need a valentine game printable that is free? Then look no further! This whimsical and FUN printable encourages children to use their fine motor skills to fill up the bunny.

How to Play the Bunny Valentine Game Printable

Directions for the Bunny Valentine Game Printable:
1. Download the Valentine game printable below and print it out. Give each player a game board and directions if needed.
2. Decide how you will fill the 20 circles on the valentine bunny: small balls of clay, tongs with pom-poms, dot markers, color in with crayons, pennies or bingo chips.
3. Flip a coin. If it lands on heads, fill in two circles. If it lands on tails, fill in one circle.
4. The first player to fill in all 20 circles on the valentine bunny is the winner.

The Bunny Valentine Game Printable encourages:

- fine motor skills
- finger strengthening
- hand strengthening
- eye-hand coordination
- visual motor coordination

This bunny fine motor valentine game printable is from the complete Flip and Fill Valentine Fine Motor Game. This digital download includes 10 different valentine game boards to practice fine motor skills and encourage hand strengthening.

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Download your FREE Bunny Valentine Game Printable Here

DOWNLOAD YOUR FREE FLIP AND FILL VALENTINE GAME

Want to make it a Valentine Matching Game?

If you want to make it a Valentine matching game, simply write random letters in each of the circles. Grab some letter beads and the children can match the letter beads to the letters in each circle.

Want to make it a Valentine Word Game?

Do you know how to play boggle? It is game where you form words from letters that are next to each other. You can turn this cute valentine game printable into a valentine word game. Simply write random letters in each of the boxes. I recommend all capital letters and include vowels.

Give each child a piece of paper. Set a timer for 3 minutes. Link the letters together to make words. Each word must be at least 3 letters. You can link letters across, down, backwards and diagonally. Score each word as follows:

- 3 letter word – 1 point
- 4 letter word – 2 points
- 5 letter word – 3 points
- 6 letters or more – 5 points
- Valentine’s Day words – 2 bonus points each!

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Want to make it a Valentine Math Game?

Grab one die. Roll the die. Color in that many circles. The first person to color in all 20 circles in the winner!

Looking for more Valentine’s Day fun?
The Flip and Fill Valentine Fine Motor packet is part of the Valentine’s Day bundle! Get more information here.
BRAIN BREAKS FOR THE CLASSROOM

Do you need quick and easy brain breaks for the classroom? You can download two FREE printables that are perfect for the classroom. These activities encourage self-regulation, body awareness, coordination, physical activity and balance all on one page. These freebies are from the complete Roll Some Fun digital download that includes 30 no-prep, boredom busting brain breaks to encourage visual motor skills, sensory motor skills, and FUN. Each game board can be done with one person or a group in a small or large space!

Roll Some Brain Breaks for the Classroom

The first free printable is one of our MOST POPULAR free downloads of all time! You can print the brain breaks for the classroom board or you can project it. You will need one die.

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Roll one die for each of the columns. Perform the quick brain break that matches the number you rolled on the die. For example, if you roll a 1-2-4-3-6 you would perform the following brain breaks: 10 jumping jacks, 5 wall push ups, 10 Twists at the waist, 10 jumps over a pencil on the floor and take 10 deep breaths.

**Roll Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes Brain Breaks for the Classroom and Self-Regulation**

These brain breaks for the classroom focuses on practicing self-regulation skills. Most children are familiar with the song “Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes”. What happens when you mix up the body parts? Students need to stop and think before they move.

Roll one die for each of the body parts listed on the brain break board. Replace the body parts that you roll into the song Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes. Sing and perform the song with the different body parts. For example, if you roll a 1, 3, 4 and 6 sing and do the motions to the song as “Foot, fingers, chin and wrist, chin and wrist. Foot fingers, chin, and wrist, chin and wrist. Eyes and ear and mouth and nose. Foot, fingers, chin and wrist, chin and wrist.” It is trickier than you think!

**Benefits of Brain Breaks for the Classroom**

Research has shown that 5-20 minute movement breaks in the classroom can positively affect the following:

1. cognitive skills including executive function, attention span, memory skills and verbal comprehension
2. academic achievement on test scores
3. attitude changes in motivation and self-concept
4. on task behaviors
5. organizational skills
6. motor planning
7. impulse control

**Download your FREE Brain Breaks for the Classroom Here**

Sign up to receive get the brain breaks here. You will be redirected to the free brain breaks for the classroom.


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