



KID-FIT®

# Preschool Activity Ideas

Hundreds of fun exercises using everyday school items



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Hundreds of fun exercises using everyday school items

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## **Introduction**

This book is for those who want a rich source of physical activity ideas to use for helping preschool children get and stay fit. The following collection of equipment ideas include common manipulative items that are relatively easy to come by or make. There are a variety of movements provided for each item.

All the ideas included in these pages have already been used in the KID-FIT Physical Education curriculum for Preschoolers. They've been integrated with success in the program since 1995. They'll work for you too if you follow the directions and recommendations.

Good luck and have fun!

## **Dedication**

This is dedicated to children all over the world. May the ideas in this book lead to healthier lifestyles for them around the globe. And personal satisfaction for you as you improve each of their lives, one by one.

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# BALANCE BEAM

Balance beam activities can be simple or complex. Smaller children will need help simply walking across the beam (make sure teachers serve as spotters to help). Older children will enjoy more complex tasks on the beam. Fit the suggestions below to the age group you're teaching. Two's and three's need the easier ideas, four's and five's more complicated. Avoid using too many ideas until children get accustomed to basic movements. The next time you use the beam or do other balancing activities incorporate ideas not used the first time. This will keep balance work new and fresh for the children and you.

## **SIMPLE**

- Walk forward across board
- Walk sideways across board (remember to do the other side too)
- Walk backwards with spotters holding hands

## **MORE DIFFICULT**

- Walk forward holding a bean bag
- Walks sideways holding a bean bag
- Walk backwards unaided
- Walk forward on tip toes
- Use same leg to step forward each time (repeat on other side)

## **CHALLENGING**

- Walk forward taking big steps
- Crouch low while walking (duck)
- Walk sideways with straight stiff legs (waddle)
- Walk with arms overhead or on top of head
- Walk backwards halfway, then turn and finish going forward
- Walk forward, do full turn in middle, keep going forward

# BALL HANDLING SKILLS

Develop the following ball handling skills through games/play ideas. Use whenever playing with balloons and/or balls.

## **SPORTS SKILLS:**

- Bounce and catch (basketball)
- Dribble (basketball)
- Kick from floor (soccer)
- Move with inside and outside of feet (soccer)
- Hold, drop ball and punt (football)
- Roll (bowling)
- Strike underhand with palm (volleyball)
- Overhand strike (tennis)
- Stand sideways, toss up and strike (tennis)
- Throw with one hand (football)
- Hike between legs (football)
- Jump and shoot (basketball)
- Spin and throw (discus)

## **PLUS THESE:**

- Bend knees, toss high as possible and catch
- Toss to a partner and catch
- Roll ball around waist and various body parts without dropping
- Kick backwards
- Walk with ball between feet or knees
- Turn ball in hands fast
- Toss up and spin around
- Throw backwards
- Pass several balls around a circle fast
- Toss from one hand to the other

## **AND FOR SCOOPS:**

- Swirl around for popcorn
- Toss and catch with both hands
- Toss and catch with one hand (use non-dominant hand also)
- Pour into hand
- Drop ball from air into lowered scoop
- Toss and catch with a partner
- See how high can toss ball into air with and without catching it
- Throw low as to roll the ball
- Toss from one side of the body, catch on the other
- See how many consecutive times ball can be caught

# BEAN BAGS

Bean bags can be used much like weight equipment for strengthening. They can also be used to develop balance and sports skills. Below are suggestions for each:

## **STRENGTH**

- Children hold a bean bag in each hand and perform traditional upper body strengthening exercises such as bicep curls, overhead tricep extensions, military presses, upright rows, chest press, etc.
- Children hold one bean bag between two hands and do chest presses, bicep curls, etc.
- Place on chest for added resistance when doing abdominal crunches.
- Squeeze between knees and walk.

## **BALANCE**

- Place one bean bag on head while moving around the room. Change position of bean bag to another body part.
- Change the manner in which children move. From tall to small, standing to crawling, slow to fast, etc.
- While standing, place bean bag on one part of the body while balancing another part. For example, place on stomach while being a three legged “crab” (hands and feet on floor, belly up).

## **SPORTS SKILLS**

- Toss and catch between partners.
- Throw in air, turn body around and catch
- Throw with foot and catch with both hands
- Throw as frisbee
- Throw at a target or in a basket

**CAUTION:** Children need ample room for this so they don't get hit in the head with flying bean bags. And, overly zealous children need to be watched so they don't use it as an opportunity to go wild.

# BUBBLES

Children love to pop bubbles. They can be used for various body awareness games. Have children:

## **POP BUBBLES WITH**

- Hands
- Specific fingers
- Elbows
- Shoulders
- Nose
- Top of head
- Ear
- Knee
- Foot

## **OR**

- Clap on a bubble
- Turn around before touching it with any of the above body parts

## **PLAY GAMES**

- Children stand on one end of the room and when you say 'go' they start running (successive times hopping, skipping, galloping, marching) to get to you and pop the bubbles you're making
- Children follow you around in a circle, moving as you direct. As you blow bubbles, instruct them on what body parts to use to pop them
- Children lay on the floor with legs in the air while you blow bubbles around their feet for them to kick and try to pop
- Children count how many bubbles they pop
- Children try to keep any bubbles from hitting the ground, even if they must use various body parts to pop them.

# GROUP BAND

The group band is used in much the same way as exercise bands or stretchy socks. The only difference is that it is one continuous loop of surgical tubing, covered with cloth for easy handling (you'll have to make it yourself). Some additional activities are possible by using the group band. All are cooperative activities:

## **CHILDREN INSIDE BAND**

### Facing outward:

1. All children stand and pull hard then let go half way
2. Same as above except pretend to be birds with arms stretched back like wings, band rests on chest
3. Same as above except band is around knees or ankles. Children hop outward and back as far as they can go.
4. With the band tight, stand and hold with both hands. Try to row the boat or do bicep curls
5. Same as above except hold band overhead and try to reach behind head and then extend arms (overhead tricep extensions)
6. Children sit holding band across belly. They must touch the band to their knees and then come back down. Also try to touch one foot with the band and return to floor
7. Same as above except children do an overhead pull-down in front of the body

### Facing inward:

1. Walk backwards as far as they can, hold it there then do 3 squats and come back. Repeat.

### Facing sideways:

2. Children turn sideways and try to walk to the outside with band around their lower leg in a
3. side step motion. Come back in, turn and repeat on other leg.

## **CHILDREN OUTSIDE BAND**

### Facing inward:

1. Children stand with band in front of them. They pull the circle big by moving backwards and
2. make it small by moving inwards.
3. Same as #1 except use one arm and then the other
4. Keep band outstretched as in #1 and then lift the arms up and down in front of the body (front raises)
5. Lift band up and behind head, then up and in front - do slow and faster
6. Sit with bent knees and row the boat
7. Same as above except use back muscles and lean backwards each time
8. Lay down with band around lower leg/ankles. Pull legs in and try to touch the band.
9. Same as #7 except hold band around one leg. Try to touch it with one or both hands
10. Children hold band with their hands behind back. They roll it up and down along their back
11. and lower legs

### Facing sideways:

1. Children turn sideways, hold on to band with one hand and tilt sideways like a "little teapot" or "oil rig". Repeat on other side

**TIP:** To get children to let go of the band, tell them you're going to call out "1-2-3 Hot!!" When you do, they must let go and hold their hands up high pretending the band will be hot, hot, hot. When it springs to the middle you can grab it quickly and take it away.

# EXERCISE BANDS/ STOCKINGS

Exercise bands are flat, rubberized bands about 3 feet long that stretch. They're used for strengthening, balance, and visual skills. When using them with children, the following cautions should be noted: 1) Care should be taken not to hold them in front of the face, tie them around the neck (yes, children do this!) or snap them at each other. 2) Adults need to know that while demonstrating they must use them *gently*, as they are made for children - not adults with stronger muscles. 3) Shoes with sharp heels will puncture and tear bands and 4) Children with latex allergies need to be watched carefully.

## UNDER BOTH FEET

- Use this way for traditional strengthening exercises such as bicep curls, upright rows, lateral raises, etc. Of course you'll need to give vivid visualizations in order to have children perform these correctly. For example, while doing standing abduction, tell children they are penguins waddling behind their mother. CAUTION: Do not have children sit, legs outstretched, with band around both feet while doing rowing motions unless band is secured more than once around feet.

## BEHIND BACK

- Strength exercises such as chest press, s-l-o-w torso rotation, etc.
- Place under rear and do various strength exercises while squatting

## IN FRONT OF BODY

- Pull arms apart for shoulder adduction to work trapezius, rhomboids and shoulder muscles.

## OVERHEAD

- Overhead strength exercises like lat pull downs, tricep extensions, etc.

## ON THE FLOOR

- Can be used for plyometric moves such as jumping over it, jumping on ends and middle (jumping jacks), jumping along length of band, etc.
- Use to balance on different body parts - one leg one arm on band, both feet one elbow, etc.

## BETWEEN PARTNERS

- Push/Pull activities such as abdominal crunches, hold in one hand and try to kick the band while standing, etc. CAUTION: Use with children old enough to follow your instructions carefully. Also, keep band away from face. Imagine if one child lost his/her grip and let go. Would the other child get hurt?

## IN AIR (see scarf activities for more ideas)

- Toss up and catch on your count
- Toss up, turn around and catch
- Wave as a scarf in different areas of space, low, middle, high
- Combine with leaping (older kids only) - like gymnastic ribbon dancers
- Throw in air, try to kick as band comes down.

# FLASH CARDS

These are great for enhancing academics and will hold children's attention while they look at the cards. Mix and match from any of the following categories:

## ACTIVITY/PICTURE CARDS

Always start with the most basic activity - imitate what is pictured on the card. Get the children used to watching for the activity cards and imitating what is on them. After they are familiar with this (after the first few classes), progress to any of the other ideas as needed. Remember, children prefer familiarity so stick with one of the concepts below for several weeks. Add or change only if the children are getting bored by the activities.

- Imitate movement but with directional changes. i.e. sideways, backwards, forwards, zig zag, in a circle, etc.
- Imitate movement adding variations in speed. i.e. fast, slow, very fast, very s-l-o-w
- Tell a story, incorporating each of the activities into the story. Show the card as the activity takes place.
- Have children imagine and demonstrate how they would perform the activity under various conditions. i.e. riding a bike on snow, riding it on the way to the toy store, riding it up a hill, riding around mud puddles, etc.
- Imitate activities but have children stop abruptly. They can freeze while standing, falling, or standing on one foot. They can freeze after counting down a predetermined number with you or by hearing a whistle.
- Imitate any of the above with children working in pairs or small groups of 3-4. Do in circles or strings of children.

## ANIMAL FLASH CARDS

Be sure to pick animals most children will recognize and know the names of. Include several they may not be so familiar with too. Change cards quickly after each imitation. Have cards you plan on using ready before starting class so you'll be ready to go.

Do include animals that make little or no noise and alternate with those that are extremely loud.

Always end with an animal that is quiet as a way to gain back control over the group.

As with other activities, stick with one of the variations below for several weeks. Children eagerly anticipate the actions ahead of time and the activities will run smoother.

- Imitate animals as children know them
- Pretend to be at the circus. What are each of the animals (you show them) doing there?
- Stretch muscles by showing a card and demonstrating how that animal may stretch. Explain why that animal would need to stretch a particular muscle.
- Imitate animals as if they were different members of a family. i.e. mother, father, sister, baby, grandpa, etc.

- Use spatial variations. Have children help pick out which animals may move close to the ground, near ground level and which are tall. Which live under water and which fly? Imitate.
- Use directional variations. Have children imitate animals while moving forward, backward, sideways, diagonally, etc.
- Use speed variations. Animals can be either tired from not resting enough or energetic from eating healthy and exercising. Or, some animals are naturally fast, others slow. Alternating speed of movement is good for work and rest intervals.
- Ask children which animals they may have at home. Which have they seen in their own back yard? Imitate their selections.
- Exaggerate the difference between animals that are very tiny and those very large.

## **NUMBER FLASH CARDS**

Use smaller numbers, usually from 0-10. In older groups you can use some of the teen numbers too. Have children act out some of the following ideas the number of times indicated on the card. Remember, children love to do the same thing over and over so once you've chosen a specific theme, stick with it for several weeks.

- Strength exercises like knee bends, sit-ups, push-ups, jumping jacks, etc. Do the number of times on the card and relate to the session theme. For example, “we need to do how many jumping jacks to keep our heart strong?” , “ we’re going to do this number of push-ups to keep our muscles strong”, “how many times are we going to wash our toes to keep the germs off?” or, “how many should we count to while we hold our breath?”, etc.
- Balance and count to the number. Have them do a particular balance exercise while counting the number on the card. For example, stand on one foot, hold their foot behind them, balance on one hand and one foot, etc.
- How many steps you take locomoting around the room using different gross motor skills.
- Partner activities like hugging, twirling, mirroring, back-to-back sliding up and down, sit-up push pulls, etc.
- Make up a story that emphasizes a particular point. Have the children count and do the same move each time throughout the story. For example, you’re explaining how everyone needs sleep. Each is being careful not to wake up a little brother or sister because they’re sleeping. Each time you hold up a number card they tip-toe that number of times, then they return to noisy play when the baby wakes up until time to sleep again.

# FLOOR MATS / MARKERS

When you are using mats for things like somersaults, twister, hopscotch, etc., or plastic place markers (spots, cones, domes) try out some of the ideas on this page for more than one use. If equipment is hard to come by, try these items. You'll need only one of each for an entire class to use them.

## WHEN USED IN OBSTACLE COURSES OR STATIONS

### MATS

Somersault - Children roll forwards, backwards, sideways, or log roll with supervision

Twister - Locomote across 2 widely spaced colors on hands and feet like a crab, sideways along one color with hands and another color with feet, backward variations of the above, on one foot, using one foot one hand, etc.

Hopscotch - On one foot, both feet, forwards, backwards, sideways, slow or fast

### MARKERS

Plastic spots - hop or leap (wider distance) across, forward, backwards, sideways, every other spot, every third spot, touching a hand and one foot each time, walking every third spot, hop with a spin, use hands and feet to move across without touching floor

Domes - Balance and move as if walking across a stream filled with rocks, move backwards, sideways, in a zig zag, with wide and narrow gaps, in a curve, in a straight line

Cones - Move around them without touching, 'drive' a car fast or slow, around sharp corners or slight (spaced close or far), crawl around, hop around, skip, gallop or tip toe around, moving through a tunnel with cones on each side

Plastic Arrows - Use to indicate which direction you want children to move

## WHEN USED IN GAMES

As directed

# HOOP ACTIVITIES

Hoops can be used for a variety of individual and cooperative group/partner activities. Try the ideas below and pick several to use for the next few weeks. When you're using hoops again, choose different ideas. Stick with just a few though, since children anticipate and enjoy the same fun concepts over and over.

## LARGE HOOPS

- Individual - Can be used per child as: Helicopters, cars, buses, horses (one leg through, over one shoulder), steering wheels, jump rope to step through, roll and chase, walk around hoop on floor with one leg in/one leg out, jump into and out of, balancing area (balance on different body parts while inside hoop), balance walking on top of the edge of hoop, spatial relations - ie be as small as possible in the hoop and take up as much space as possible, etc.
- Pairs - Partner activities include riding in a car taking turns with driving, spinning around in a circle, walking through and back again and again, holding on to each other like a train while moving around the track ( top of hoop), facing each other and steering the wheel, flying a helicopter together, one partner turns hoop like a revolving door while other goes through and then they switch, place two rows of hoops on each side of room - when you give the signal children run to hoop across from them and do something inside the hoop you've indicated, roll hoop back and forth to each other, etc.
- Groups - Magic Circles - children move (walking, galloping, skipping, running, hopping, etc.) around the room careful not to touch or step inside a "magic circle". When you blow the whistle the hoops become "magic" and turn them into an animal, machine, grown up person with unique occupation, (or any theme you decide) when they step inside. Keep theme the same throughout game.

## Games

- Freeze Game - Walk around hoops on floor slowly or fast (you direct). When the whistle blows they must get inside quick and "freeze" while standing on one foot, balancing on a foot and an arm, or one hand and one foot lifted from crab position, etc. Each time inside they do a different balance exercise.
- Musical Hoops - Children locomote around the room until you stop the music, then they all rush to stand inside a hoop where it's "safe". Children share hoops with other children and you can eliminate hoops until you have only a few left that all children squeeze into.
- Pop Goes The Weasel - Children move around room with hoop held overhead. When you yell "Pop Goes The Weasel" they all stop, let hoop fall over their bodies to the ground and freeze.

## **SMALL HOOPS\***

- Individual - Walk/hop with hoops held by legs held wide apart, use over body as if getting dressed for school or undressed for their bath, also use many of the above ideas for larger hoops as long as children can easily fit through them, etc.
- Pairs - Jump (one at a time) into and out of hoop, hold hands and run/walk/skip/gallop around hoop without feet going inside, locomotor around room until whistle blows then go inside hoop with partner and dance, locomotor around room until whistle blows then go inside hoop with partner and freeze while hugging/standing on one foot/looking though own legs/etc., have kids be an Easter bunny looking for eggs while hopping around room - then jump inside and be very quiet so no one finds the eggs, put hoop around arm of one child while the other tries to shake his/her hand - the shaking should rotate the hoop around and around their arms, etc.
- Groups - Hop through hoops lined up in a row, run through them as football players, spread hoops out and have them leap from one to another or walk with a long stride, many of the above games for larger hoops, etc.

\*ALWAYS make sure **every** child can fit into the hoop before instructing or selecting exercises that require putting the hoop around body.

# LADDER

Although ladders are usually used as part of an obstacle course, it is important to know some variations on how to use them. Once children have mastered a particular movement pattern, provide them with another. These are great for developing muscular strength.

## LAYING FLAT ON THE FLOOR

- Move across top using rungs for alternating hand and foot placement - just like climbing a real ladder
- Same as above except skip rungs
- Move across top going sideways with feet against one rail and hands along the other
- Move across top with hands on rungs and feet along side rails or vice versa
- Move across but put one foot on a rung a hand is on before moving hand to next rung
- Walk through ladder being careful not to touch any part of the sides or rungs
- Same as above except go backwards, sideways, skip a space, etc.
- Two children walk along sides of ladder, facing each other with arms held like a bridge overtop. They scoot sideways to the end of the ladder without touching it.

## PROPPED UP ON SIDE

Have a teacher help hold it in this position so that it does not fall on anyone.

ONLY USE THE FOLLOWING IF *ALL* CHILDREN CAN FIT EASILY THROUGH RUNGS

- Have them weave in and out of the ladder while crawling forward
- Same as above except backwards
- Same as above except feet first (this is good if you need to slow down part of the course)
- In pairs with one crawling backwards and the other crawling forwards, holding each other with one hand

## ON SMALL INCLINE

Secure each end and make sure a teacher is at each end - only make the incline slight 1- 2 feet and use only with the older children

- Have children climb up the ladder and the teacher takes them off
- Have children climb backwards down the ladder

# LUMMI / RHYTHM STICKS

**Lummi sticks** consist of two hand held baton type sticks. They are used to tap out rhythms in various arm positions. **Rhythm sticks** are different in that they are usually narrower, and one is ribbed in order to create different sounds while tapping out rhythms. Regardless of which you are using, children will enjoy a variety of ways to strike them. Some of the most popular are listed below:

## TAPPING

- \* High overhead
- \* Low to the ground
- \* On the floor
- \* Grate one against other
- \* To the side
- \* Behind back
- \* On specific body parts
- \* Tap ends (advanced)
- \* In front of body
- \* Under knee
- \* Hammer one with other

## MOVES TO INTERSPERSE WITH TAPPING (these *don't* make noise)

- \* Reach arms out to sides
- \* Roll sticks one over other
- \* Make letter with the sticks
- \* Bend and reach to each side
- \* Reach high in air
- \* Reach for a toe or knee
- \* March with it like a baton
- \* Push outward in front of body
- \* Kick and tap, front or back
- \* Arm circles

## FOR VARIETY

- \* Change tapping tempo - do some parts with fast taps, others slower.
- \* How loud and quiet can they tap?
- \* How tall and short they can look/move
- \* Add stationary moves and gross motor skills for interest like a hop, jog or march in place
- \* Add counting out loud to help children remember specific parts

Both lummi and rhythm sticks are usually used with a choreographed routine that is either preselected or that you create. The important thing to remember is that the routine should be done exactly the same way each time so the children can learn it. If you are creating it yourself, fit the routine to the music so children have an easier time learning it. For example, to the song “This Old Man”, you may want them to go “rolling home” each time by rolling their sticks one over the other.

# OBSTACLE COURSE VARIATIONS

When running an obstacle course it's a good idea to keep it exactly the same for at least 3-4 weeks. After that time, you can add some of the following variations to renew its freshness and keep the children motivated.

1. Change direction of the course. Have them do it the opposite way. Even switch directions when you call out "switch" or blow a whistle.
2. Add variation to individual components. For example, have them start going across the balance beam sideways, then backwards, then on their toes. Have them go across the twister mat sideways or on one foot. Have them hop through hoops that are lying on the floor forward, sideways, or backwards.
3. Use opposite relationships. Get children to crawl instead of walking or stand on tip toes instead of flat feet. Have them imagine being tall vs. little, big vs. small, heavy vs. light, loud vs. quiet.
4. Make a brand new activity out of one of the stations. For example, make the limbo bar into a short hurdle or fence to belly crawl under. Use the ladder on its side (if all children are small enough to fit through easily) instead of flat on the floor. Straddle walk across the somersault mat.
5. Change the order of items in the course. Putting things in a different order brings excitement all over again. It also helps if one particular area always seems to clog up - you can place two items together that require more time.
6. Change the difficulty of some of the moves. Have children hop on one foot instead of two. Have them walk across every other stepping stone. Have them walk across the balance beam with bigger steps or arms held over head.
7. Get them to add an imaginary move to the course. Allow room between two stations and they get to do their own imaginary move (fit it in with a theme so they can come up with an idea easier) when they get to that point. Make sure a teacher stays there to remind/help them. All children can do their own move or you can choose one child's for a while, then another's, etc.

# PARACHUTES

Parachutes, or even a large sheet, can be used energetically by children to develop strength, endurance, visual and gross motor skills. When using parachutes, choose from the following grips; 1) overhand, 2) cross over - overhand grip with hands crossed over top of each other, 3) underhand grip or 4) alternate (one hand over, the other under). Vary the grip for interest and to maximize strengthening. Here are some fun parachute activities:

## **INFLATION FUN**

Children grasp parachute and lift and lower it together, creating a breeze. This motion can be varied by:

- Waving hands up high and down to the ground, creating an air pocket underneath. On the downward motion, hold chute to the ground, like a mushroom
- Walking inward as the chute inflates and outward as it deflates
- Having them turn around and go under at the highest point, pulling chute down to the ground over them - like going inside an igloo.
- Same as above but with heads sticking outside. Let the chute go at the top of the movement and try to lay still on the floor before it comes down and covers everyone
- Same as above except everyone tries to move away from parachute until after it lands.
- Ask them what the chute looks like after it settles to the floor.
- Moving the chute slow and fast, with big and small movements
- Placing lightweight balls (yarn, nerf) on top of the chute and try to shake them high in the air or off the chute altogether. “Pop” the popcorn.

## **MUSCLE BUILDERS**

- Place bean bags or moderately heavy items in the middle of chute and try to bounce them into the air
- Have children grip the chute and pull as hard as they can backwards
- Have children grip the chute while facing away from it and pull as hard as they can, like a horse pulling a cart
- Do the above two on bended knees
- Hold on by one hand, pull hard while waving the other arm as if a rodeo cowboy/cowgirl
- Any of the above using one hand, then the other

## **GAMES**

- Children take turns, two at a time, walking across the top of the parachute while children kneel and gently shake it. Pretend they are walking on the moon or on the clouds
- Same as above except choose two children to be mice. They must go under the parachute and get to the other side before they get trapped by those on top. Repeat with two other children, etc.

- Everyone stands and shakes the chute while two children let go and run around everyone one time back into their places. Then, another 2 children run around until all have had a turn.
- Half the children get to be sharks under the parachute while the others are sailors making ocean waves. The sharks circle underneath and tap at the toes of those standing. Switch and let sharks become the sailors and vice versa.

### **RHYTHM AND DANCES**

Develop your own simple routines and dances that incorporate basic locomotor skills, different directions and levels, moving forward, backwards, and sideways. Include dance steps, twirling, and other traveling movement.

**TIP:** To get children to let go of the parachute, tell them it's wind-up time and say "1-2-3 roll". Then show them how they can all roll the ends towards the middle to put it away.

# SCARVES

Lightweight juggling scarves can be used for a variety of activities. Hold a scarf by a corner while moving it through the air. Scarves help teach children about the pathways around their bodies. The following are a few suggested ways to use them:

## **PRACTICING MOVEMENT PATHWAYS -use one hand, the other and both**

1. Circles - to the front, overhead, to the side.
2. Up and down - imitate the motion of throwing out a fishing line
3. In an arc - in front of the body like windshield wipers
4. Floor sweep - back and forth close to floor as if sweeping floor, also through legs
5. Flag wave - move back and forth in front of the body as if waving a flag
6. Figure 8 - in front of the body
7. Squiggles - move rapidly in a squiggly, rippled manner like Olympians using a ribbon stick.
8. Hold by two corners and wave up, down and across
9. Free expression - let children create their own moves (use this for short periods of time only)
10. Use scarves as a rhythm activity. Take a song and design movements to go with it. Do the song the same each time.
11. Combinations of the above using slow and fast movements

## **GAMES**

1. Ball up the scarf and throw up into air. Catch on head, arm, neck, back, leg, spin around one time and catch, etc.
2. Have half the class tuck scarf into pants and run. The other half try to catch them like a cat and mouse game. Once you lose your scarf, you can catch someone else's. Switch and let other half be the mouse (this will only work with older children and depends upon the clothes children wear).
3. Blast off after counting to 10 (or another number) while in a crouched position. Scarf is balled up while counting and then released into the air while saying "Blast off".
4. Place scarf on head and pretend to be germs, fat or some other villain. Design a game in which you exterminate the villain. Example, children are germs and you're the soap. If you touch them they'll slide down the drain and won't be able to hurt anyone.
5. Become a machine, animal, etc., to do strength exercises. For example, hold ends of scarf in each hand pull against each end tightly. Turn s-w-l-o-w-l-y to each side imitating an old washing machine.
6. Catching/throwing games. Individuals or partners throw and catch overhead, through legs, from one hand to the other (juggling motion), toss and clap before catching, wait to see how close it can get to the floor before you catch it, toss and touch a body part before catching, etc.
7. Draw letters of the alphabet or numbers with the scarf in the air.
8. Pick up scarf in the middle with thumb, pointer and middle fingers. Raise hand high and release scarf at the top of the movement (Flick wrist up to release). Watch it float downwards and catch with a clawing motion (grab it). Do with one hand and the other.

# SIGNS

Hand-held paddle signs are great for teaching children about things like traffic safety and emotions. They're easy to make and inexpensive. When you use them, make sure you make the activity a moving one. For example:

## TRAFFIC

- Have them become a train and travel when you hold up the "Railroad Crossing" sign - ask if it's alright to cross the tracks if lights flash or they hear a train coming.
- Hold up the "Walk" sign and get them to walk - not run - across the street while you let them know why they shouldn't run.
- "Go" can mean travel in any manner you choose - run, skip, gallop, etc.
- "Stop" and "Don't Walk" always freeze instantaneously.
- The "Phone" sign can signal an emergency, they can become a fire engine or ambulance and move around looking for the person who needs help
- The "Danger" sign can be acted out like the Lost in Space Robot - wave arms and twirl around saying "Danger, Danger"

## EMOTIONS

- Happiness can be acted out by going on a favorite ride, piece of playground equipment, playing with a pet, riding a Disneyland ride, riding a new bike, using a new pair of skates, etc.
- Sadness can be acted out by tip toeing and going to bed, getting a boo boo by rolling down a hill, losing something and looking for it, carrying a heavy toy to the toy store to get it fixed, or cleaning up a room.
- Anger can be expressed by stomping, kicking and punching in response to wanting an unhealthy food that they can't have until after eating dinner, having a brother or sister yell at them, not being able to do something themselves, etc. Always relay that it is *not* alright to punch, kick or stomp on another person. Acceptable ways to express anger are to talk and say you're mad, hit something that can't be hurt - like a pillow or bed or do something physical like run fast.
- Surprise can be jumping for joy because they won a prize, opening and using a birthday gift, going to the park to play with a friend, etc.
- Confused can be expressed by trying to decide which side of the room to run to, the side with the toys or the side with the puppies. Or, locomoting in one direction (train, airplane, car, bus, truck, bulldozer, etc.) and then, not knowing which way to go, deciding to go the other way.
- Disgusted can be called "Yuck". Children can crawl on their belly through a smelly swamp, fall into Oscar's stinky trash can and fumble to get out, step in bubble gum and get all gooed up, roll around in the sand or dirt and get some in their mouth, etc.

## **STORIES**

You can also weave together a story which includes all the signs. Children will find it easy to remember and all you'll have to do is make sure signs are in order before beginning. For example, on your way to the park you have to cross a big street so you wait for the "walk" sign. After walking across the street you see some kids riding their bikes without helmets into an unsafe construction area. They crash and you must call 911 ("phone") for the ambulance to come. The ambulance goes fast through the "green light" but has to wait for a train to finish crossing the track ("railroad crossing"). Then the ambulance stops near the "stop" sign because that's where the children are laying. When they carry the children away they go slow until they know it's safe ("yield") to go faster so no one else gets hurt. Everyone becomes more careful around traffic and when the "don't walk" sign comes on, everyone freezes.

# SPORTS EQUIPMENT

There's many different types of sports equipment suitable for small children to safely use. Use a variety to familiarize them with the basic sports movements. Some of the most popular include:

## **BALLS**

- Hackey Sacks - Vinyl, will not bounce or roll away, used with a scoop - refer to Ball Handling Skills sheet
- Small Bouncing Balls-Squishy foam, Tennis
- Soft Balls - Will not hurt, good for more forceful games - Nerf, Sock
- Yearn Balls - Best when used in pairs or in a group. Small children like to tear them apart and don't focus on the group activity well. Good for parachute activities
- Inflatable - Refer to Ball Handling Skills sheet
- Medium Bouncing Balls - Refer to Ball Handling Skills sheet
- Large Beach-Play Ball - Best for group activities

## **RACKETS**

- Badminton
- Tennis

## **FRISBEES**

- Small plastic

## **RING TOSS**

- Rings with posts
- Horse shoes

## **BOWLING**

- Larger Plastic Pins

## **PADDLES**

- Sponge
- Rubber ball paddles with ball and elastic string removed

## **SCOOPS**

- See Ball Handling Skills sheet

# TUG-OF-WAR ROPES

Tug-of-war ropes can be used for strength, developing gross motor skills, cardiovascular exercise and balance. A few ideas are:

## STRENGTH

**Children stand in 2 groups facing each other on different ends of the rope, teacher in middle of rope:**

1. One half against the other (separate by boys, girls, blue eyes, brown, color clothes, etc.) using both hands to pull.
2. Same as above except have all use left hand only, then right.
3. Same as #1 except have children face away from each other, pull like donkeys.
4. With teacher directing movement, sway rope to one side and the other. Count to three and let the rope go one direction as if that side was stronger. Then count to three again and pull more to the other side.
5. Sitting on floor, two groups face each other and pull at the same time.
6. Sitting on floor, two groups face each other and pull at different times (ask each to freeze when you tell them so you can make sure each side gets a chance to use their abdominals)
7. Sitting have all face sideways with rope in front of them. Do overhead Tricep extensions, Latt pulls and rowing motions.

## GROSS MOTOR SKILLS / CARDIOVASCULAR

**Children stand, straddle and hold the ropes facing the same direction**

1. Choo Choo - move like a train, slow and fast
2. Roller Coaster - run and swerve like a coaster, going uphill and down
3. Caterpillar - run with tiny little steps short and tall
4. Snake - tip toe in curved and zig zag pathways
5. Cowboy - gallop together in unison, look for cows and stop

**Ropes on floor, children circle room following the teacher, each time around they can:**

6. Straddle and move across fast - like a football run
7. Ski jump side to side over the rope while moving down the length of it
8. Place two ropes parallel and rather close to one another, have children run from one end of room and broad jump over the "river"
9. Have children do arm movements standing behind a rope lying on floor, when you tell them, they jump over and back a specific number of times.
10. Ask children to make up their own ways of moving over the rope without touching it.

## BALANCE

**While standing:**

1. Children hold rope as if ready to do a tug-of-war. Have all of them lift their left leg, then right.
2. Have them do various things while standing on one foot like kick, circle their foot, etc.
3. Have them all stand on top of the rope and balance with arms out to side.
4. Have them walk along the rope, going around when they get to the end and doing it again.
5. Ask them how they can put both their hands and feet on the rope at the same time, one hand two feet, one foot two hands, one hand one foot.

# VINYL SHAPES

Vinyl shapes have endless uses. Use a variety of colors and shapes. Below are a few ways to use them for gross motor skills, cardiovascular exercise, strength and balance:

## **GROSS MOTOR SKILLS / CARDIOVASCULAR**

### **Teaching colors:**

- Have children do different gross motor skills in a circle around all vinyl. Blow a whistle to signal that they need to go stand on the color you tell them.
- Have children begin by hopping on top of a particular color. Blow the whistle or use a cue word to signal that they can leave their spot (maybe like a bird, they can fly away and then come back to the nest later - or be a vegetable and get mixed in a salad) and return when they hear the whistle again.
- Have children pick a color, locomote around the room assigning a mood to each color (move representing that mood - blue/sad, red/happy, yellow/afraid, etc.), returning to the vinyl when you signal.
- Ask nutrition questions. If answer is “yes”, go to a particular color, if “no” go to another.

### **Teaching shapes:**

- Have children do different gross motor skills in a circle around vinyl. Blow a whistle to signal that they need to go stand on the shape you tell them.
- Have children begin by hopping on top of a particular shape. Blow the whistle or use a cue word to signal that they can leave their shape (maybe refer to it as their favorite toy that they have to put away and get back out to play with later) and return when they hear the whistle again.
- Have children pick a shape, locomote around the room in that shape (move in a circular pattern, square, triangular or rectangular), returning to the vinyl shape when you signal. Also do this by having them move around individual vinyl pieces, jumping on top when you signal (like musical chairs).
- Ask educational questions. If answer is “yes”, go to a particular shape, if “no” go to another.

### **Teaching body parts:**

- Have children do different gross motor skills in a circle around vinyl. Blow a whistle to signal that they need to put the body part you tell them on a specific color or shape.
- Have children begin by standing on top of a particular shape or color. Blow the whistle or use a cue word to signal that they can leave their shape and return after circling the room. When they return they must put a different body part on the vinyl.
- Have children gather at one side of the room. When you count to “three” all go and put their ear, nose, head, elbow, etc., etc. on a particular shape or color. Repeat with another body part. They can move quietly, crawl, with a partner, on their heels, etc., etc., etc.
- Ask related questions. If the answer is “yes”, put one body part on any piece of vinyl, if “no” place a different body part on it.

## **STRENGTH**

### **Teaching colors, shapes, and body parts:**

- Have children share shapes and become a see saw with each other to work legs. Move to another color or shape and do it again. Do a see saw again but while sitting for abs.
- While sharing shapes children become dogs and drink out of their water bowl to do push-ups. Move to another food bowl (color or shape) and do it again.
- Have the second child do a crab over top of a child lying on top of a particular shape or color. Then have children switch positions.
- On slippery floors have children move vinyl with only their hands or only one foot. They can also do the twist while standing on top of smaller vinyl pieces or sit and twirl around in a circle by moving with hand only, legs in air.
- On carpeted floors children can do plyometric jumps onto and off of any vinyl piece or one you indicate.

## **BALANCE**

### **Teaching colors, shapes and body parts:**

- Have children go to a specific color/shape and find a way to only touch one part of their body on it while the rest of their body stays in the air.
- Have children go to a specific color with a friend and hug each other while standing on one leg
- Have children pretend to be an animal and go to a specific color while holding arms and one leg out in front (flamingo).
- Have pairs of children go to a specific color or shape. While facing and mirroring each other, stand on one foot, make a ugly face, put one hand on vinyl, lift one leg, etc.
- Same as above except children hold on to hands while facing away from each other. Have them turn around quickly on the vinyl until to tell them stop. Then they have to stop and not move.
- Repeat last example except stand on one foot when you say stop. Then squat low when you say stop, etc.

# WATER BOTTLES

The following are ideas to use when working with water filled plastic 2 liter bottles (Fill with 1/3 water and a few drops of food coloring). Remember, use them as a piece of weight equipment. Play on children's active imaginations to accomplish this. Here are some ways:

- Have children shake their water bottle imitating different machines. A washing machine, blender, Steam roller, etc.
- Have children play different instruments in a marching band. Have them shake their instrument to get it started or when finishing.
- Have children count out loud the number of times they do a specific exercise you choose. Like bicep curls, overhead tricep extensions, etc. Or have them do super slow reps followed by fast ones.
- Make up a story in which work for each of the major muscles is included. As they enact the story, they perform the different strength exercises. For example, they take large steps (lunges) while crossing the river on the way to see a cartoon friend. Upon arrival, everyone is so happy they throw their hands in the air for joy! (military press), etc., etc., etc.
- Have children become different cartoon characters which behave in very different ways. Mickey Mouse holds the bottle over his head as if it was his ears, Kermit the Frog places it between the knees and hops, etc.
- Whole body jiggle. Have children shake bottles fast, then slow, then freeze, then go again. Do in front of body, overhead, bent over, behind back, etc.

You can also use 2 smaller water bottles in place of one larger 2-litre bottle. Children would use them in pairs, like a set of dumbbells. NOTE: Make sure all caps are on very tight.

# WOBBLE BOARDS

Wobble boards are square boards with a strip of wood running down the center on the bottom side. The top can have a stripe down the middle for varied foot placement. They're used primarily for balancing activities. Children develop a keener sense of balance by trying to distribute their weight evenly between different body parts and in different planes. Challenge can be added or decreased by extending arms and/or legs in the air. Here are a few of the many, many possibilities:

## **BALANCE ON FEET**

- Children place one foot on each side of the center stripe (wide grip, wobble side to side). A game would be to go "racing" by moving both legs alternately like a see-saw and then stopping instantly on your command. When stopping they must balance in the middle.
- Have children place a foot on far ends of the stripe (wide grip, able to wobble front and back).
- Children can pretend to be surfing, (leading with one foot and then the other) but when you say "surfs up!" they must stop and balance their weight from front to back.
- Do either or both of the above and intersperse with locomotor movement around the room. Always make sure children slow down *before* they get on the wobble board or it will slide out from under them. You may want to tip-toe immediately before getting on the board.

## **BALANCE ON KNEES**

- With knees on center stripe, tilt body forward and back. They're a "woodpecker" until you tell them a hunter is coming and they must freeze (balance in middle).
- With knees on each side of center stripe, they're in a Disneyland ride. They swerve from side to side until you say ride is "broken", at which time they freeze in the middle.

## **BALANCE ON STOMACH**

- With body lying on the board with center stripe going across stomach, children can pretend they're diving into a pool and coming up for air like a dolphin. When you say "food", they all freeze in the middle waiting to get their meal. You can pretend to throw out fish to them.
- With body lying on board with center stripe running up and down, kids can pretend they're on a sled, bobsled like in the Olympics or toboggan. They "Zoom" around corners, going faster and faster until you say "Rock in the way!". Then they must hold their position balancing in the middle with arms and legs extended.

## **BALANCE ON TWO DIFFERENT BODY PARTS**

- Can children place one or both feet on one side of the stripe and a hand on the other?
- Can they place two hands and one foot on one side and the other?
- How many body parts can they place along the center stripe?
- Can they sit on the center stripe with arms and legs in the air?
- How about walking around board slowly, and then getting on top as an animal (crab, ostrich, etc.)?

**CAUTION:** When children use the wobble boards, they need to spread out as much as possible and to be told not to put their fingers under theirs or anyone else's while they're playing with them. It's easy to get fingers pinched in close quarters if children are picking them up and moving them around.

# CARDIOVASCULAR GAMES

There are endless games to play with children which can give them a cardiovascular workout while developing gross motor activity. Some of the ones that are particularly fun - leading to squeals of delight - follow:

## **1. DAYTIME /NIGHT TIME**

Children move around room performing one gross motor skill. You yell “night time” and they all lay down to go to sleep. When you say “day time” they all get up and do another skill. Explain by asking them what they like to do when they play in the day time and imitating those moves. For example, ride a bike, ride a horse, swim, etc.

## **2. STATUES**

Children follow you around the room doing the move you do. When you say “freeze”, they all turn into statues and can not move an inch. Then begin moving again with another locomotor move. Repeat. Try this with a mechanical motion too, as if all are robots moving and freezing up.

## **3. MARCHING BAND**

Children pretend they’re in a marching band, playing their favorite instrument. When you say “switch”, everyone must turn around quickly and start marching in the other direction. Repeat with speed variations.

## **4. ROLLER COASTER**

Everyone pretends they’re strapped into a roller coaster ride. Children run while imagining the coaster going very slowly uphill until it gets to the top. Then it goes fast, fast, fast to the bottom. Continue with ride up and down, over and over again.

## **5. BLAST-OFF**

All children crouch low to the ground and count down from a specified number to (10 works well). When they reach 10, everyone jumps up high in the air while yelling “Blast off!” Repeat.

## **6. OBSTACLE COURSES**

Predetermined items are provided for you to set up in any order you wish. Try to arrange them according to how fast children filter through each one otherwise you’ll have everyone trying to get “through the tunnel” or other slow-moving activity at the same time.

## **7. STATIONS**

Works best with older children, small groups and lots of teacher help. An easier version can be done by having several stations in which all children go to at the same time with you and then return to the middle before going to another. For example, “Vegetable soup” is a game in which vegetable signs are placed around the room, hula hoops on the floor in the middle. Children go either to their favorite vegetable or to one you tell them and dig it up, pick it or find a way to get it. When you tell them, they return to the middle and fry, blend, boil or cook the vegetable in some way while standing in the hoops. Repeat with another vegetable.

## **8. ACROSS THE ROOM**

Children move quickly from one side of the room to the other, first running then eventually moving any way you tell them (they usually can't contain their excitement though and end up running anyway) This is great for having children collect/sort items (like plastic foods from one side of room) and depositing in another container on the other side of room, going quickly to imaginary scenarios like fires, hurrying, etc. Make sure a teacher is in between the two different directions of movement to make sure children don't start running the same way and collide into each other. Also, you may want to make a game out of this by dividing the room into two groups and seeing who can get to the other side without touching anyone.

## **9. MISCELLANEOUS GAMES**

Make up your own fun filled movement games. Just remember, to keep it beneficial for the heart it must involve continuous movement using the large muscles in the legs or continuous movement interspersed with easier active movement as in interval training.

# DANCES

From time to time, children learn various dances. They love to learn a choreographed dance and once learned can be revisited time and time again. Some of the most popular include:

- Conga - 1-2-3-kick
- Chicken Fat
- Hokey Pokey
- If You're Happy and You Know It
- Macarena
- Mexican Hat Dance
- Old Brass Wagon
- Polkas
- Pop Goes The Weasel
- The Twist
- This Old Man
- YMCA

## 60 NIFTY THEMES FOR FITNESS ACTIVITIES

Below are 60 themes you can play with to warm-up, strengthen, use during aerobic exercise or for stretching. There are many more ideas than these- use your imagination. Think like a kid!

1. Zoo animals
2. Circus
3. Playground equipment
4. Parade
5. Grooming
6. Sports
7. Olympics
8. Transportation
9. Nature - vegetation, sky, ocean, dessert
10. Body parts
11. Rodeo
12. Partners/friends
13. Holidays
14. Foods/cooking
15. Alphabet
16. Weather - hurricane, earthquake, rain, snow, sun
17. Helping with tasks - lawn, groceries, housework
18. Colors
19. Numbers
20. Pets
21. Community workers
22. Current children's movies/ cartoon characters
23. Tired/strong
24. Silly and crazy
25. High and low - giants and mice, ice blocks and water
26. Trash
27. Earth/ space - robots, space ships
28. Shapes
29. Getting "stuck"
30. Bugs
31. Dinosaurs
32. Dancing
33. Taking pictures
34. Getting dirty/ clean
35. Painting/ drawing
36. Sit and stand
37. Bones, muscles, heart, lungs, other body part themes
38. Cultures/ countries
39. Farm - scarecrow, birds, dirt, farmer, chickens, seeds
40. Fairy tales
41. Follow the leader
42. Seasons
43. Superheroes
44. Mirrors
45. City/ country
46. TV shows
47. Cold/ hot temperatures
48. Rides - merry go round, saucers
49. Machines
50. Open and close
51. Simon Says
52. Shoes - ballet, tennis, hiking, etc.
53. Toys - wind-up, robotic, wooden
54. Wake up/ go to sleep
55. Outdoors - camp, fish, rainbow
56. Construction - hammer, nail, saw
57. Military people/items
58. What there are 2 of - 3, 4, 5, etc.
59. Parties
60. Magic

When deciding on a theme for your exercises, *be as specific as possible*. Each concept above can lead to numerous more specific ideas.

**Examples:**

A theme based on foods/cooking can mean anything from shopping for foods to cook for dinner to chopping or blending them to making a pizza to imitating their shapes.

Seasons could include visuals like 1) picking flowers, washing the car, cleaning windows and playing baseball for spring 2) summer for swimming, eating barbecued chicken, corn on the cob, paddling a canoe 3) fall means raking leaves, jumping into leaves, picking apples, putting on a jacket and 4) skating in winter, building a snowman, shoveling snow, making angels in snow, drinking hot chocolate.

Earth and space could be an adventure on a spaceship with astronauts, stars, the sun and moon. Or, it could be things you can see on earth from way up high. Or, it could be all about how to keep the earth clean by recycling.

Getting “stuck” could mean getting stuck on glue, gum or other things you step on. Or, it could mean getting stuck in a certain position because your battery ran out of energy or you ran out of gas. It could also refer to getting trapped in traffic in a car or other forms of transportation.

As you can see, any one of the above themes - or a combination of several - would provide more than enough ideas for a full exercise class. The options are really endless. So, just be *as specific as possible* and the ideas will go farther and help you design your own unique creations.