

# Physical Activity Ideas for Pre-Schoolers (3 - 5 year olds)

In our toddlers (1- 3 year olds) article we spoke about your child's developmental milestones and those specific to the toddler age group. In this article we will revisit some of those milestones and show you the progression to which your child should take as they develop through the pre-school phase.

During this period of growth we aim to build strong foundations for basic motor skills. Infants gradually develop voluntary control over their movements and their motor development can be due to a number of things such as maturation, both physically and mentally, as well as the activity experiences they have been exposed to. If a child is brought up in an inactive home environment there is negative flow-ons to the child's development – the mantra is to be active with your kids, good for them and good for you.

It's important to understand what your pre-schooler can handle. They should participate in fun, challenging activities that encourage building on their basic foundation skills, like running, skipping and jumping, into more complex moves like hopping, skipping with a rope or hula hoop, and throwing and catching ball, or running while kicking a ball. The most important thing to remember is while we must challenge them, do not push beyond their abilities or you could jeopardize their confidence in that skill for later in life.

As mentioned in previous articles developmental milestones are a set of age-specific tasks that most children can do at a certain age. However, remember that every child is unique and these milestones are guides only. The milestones that are listed for each age group, is additional to the skills of the previous age group.

By the time they reach 4 and 5 they have loads of energy to master motor skills and absolutely love to try new things and show you how clever they are at doing them. Take advantage of your child's natural tendency to be active. Staying fit will help improve kids' self-esteem and decrease the risk of serious illnesses later in life.



And by the end of 3 years of age they should:

- Climb well
- Walk up and down stairs, alternating feet
- Kick a ball
- Run easily
- Pedal a tricycle
- Bend over easily without falling.

And by the end of 4 years of age they can:

- Hop and stand on 1 foot for up to 5 seconds
- Go upstairs and downstairs without support
- Kick a ball forward
- Throw a ball overhand
- Catch a bouncing ball most of the time
- Move forward and backward with agility.

And by the end of 5 years of age they can:

- Stand on 1 foot for 10 seconds or longer
- Hop and do somersaults
- Swing and climb
- Maybe able to skip with a rope or hula hoop
- May move side to side with agility.

I'm often asked what the difference between structured and unstructured playtime is, and which is better for your child?

That's a bit like asking, "Which is better, fruits or vegetables?" Someone who eats healthily is going to have both without even thinking about it. If you're providing plenty of playtime opportunities for your child, then both kinds of play are taking place.

Structured play has a set of rules with specific objectives. Most games fall under the category of structured play. Organized sports such as netball, soccer, hockey, tennis etc are all examples of structured activities. For pre-schoolers some examples of structured activities are dance lessons, gymnastics and Kindy gym or Gymeroo or fitness sessions at your local health and leisure facility, or even a program that has been implemented into your child's pre-school. Generally speaking, when your child is engaging in structured play, she is seeking the most efficient way to achieve pre-existing objectives.

Unstructured play is open-ended with unlimited possibilities. Playing with blocks is unstructured play. So is coloring, drawing or painting on blank paper. Letting them explore their backyard or a local park, then even add some equipment like different types of balls or structures to climb on allows them to develop in their own way and to make their own decisions about their activity they are going to play. Inventing games to play is unstructured activity. So is running around the playground or park. Generally speaking, when your child is engaging in unstructured play, they are in the process of establishing their own objectives. It is usually much more imaginative play.

A consideration more important than structured vs. unstructured play is to ask whether the activity holds your child's full attention, that they are having fun while learning new skills or just improving skills they already have. We all know that a young child has a limited attention span and their most basic personal need in terms of play is that it's fun. With that as a guideline and an awareness of what kind of development milestones your preschooler should be achieving just have fun with them, make sure they are too and be aware of developmental guidelines but not hung up on them.

Enjoy!

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Bibliography and Resources:

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