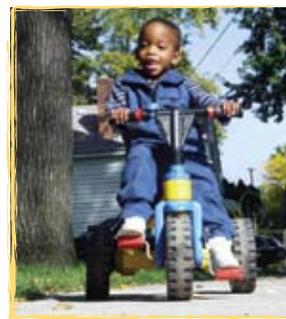


A child's interests are

Windows of Opportunity

to fun and enjoyable learning

Jumping, bouncing,
and other
“big muscle play”
are powerful
learning activities
for many young children



Places to learn and activities to enjoy **AT HOME**

Throughout the house

- Don't let a rainy day slow down your movement-loving child. Work together—and perhaps with one of his/her playmates—to create a temporary indoor obstacle course that will soon have them running, skipping, jumping, climbing—and giggling! Tap your creativity to use common household items in interesting ways as you build the course. A stack of sofa cushions might form a great “mountain” to climb over, for example. Drape a blanket between chairs and you'll have a dark tunnel to crawl through. Lay a length of string or yarn on the floor to form a winding path he/she can follow to weave in and out through a row of kitchen chairs. Include lots of safe obstacles to hop or leap over—throw pillows, stuffed animals, and block towers are some possibilities. Tape a large number or letter on each obstacle so your child won't miss one as he races through the course.

Bedroom

- Redirect your little one's urge to jump on beds by providing other bouncy alternatives. A mini exercise trampoline (with short legs) might be just right for your small child. Some alternatives? Ask local mattress retailers if they have a small “model” segment of a mattress or box spring they no longer need for display. Placed on the floor, this—or an old futon—could be a fun and fairly safe bouncing spot!

Out in the yard

- Set up a backyard “exercise course” that's just right for tots. You could even make a sign for each “activity station” with a stick-figure drawing showing how to do the activity. Your child will love rotating among four or five “stations” where he gets to do things like stretch to touch his toes, throw balls through a hoop hanging from a tree branch, walk along a 2' by 4' “balance beam” board placed on the ground, or run to the mailbox and back three times. Use your imagination and the everyday materials you have around the house or in your yard to create the activities. To keep the fun going, change the challenges frequently, adding new ones to match your child's developing skills and interests.
- Introduce your child to simpler versions of some of the active, outdoor games older children often love to play with neighborhood playmates. Some longtime favorites are “Duck, Duck, Goose,” “Mother, May I?” and “Red Rover.”
- Movement-loving children are rarely happier than when they're roughhousing around with Dad or Mom. Swooping through the air in Daddy's strong arms or dissolving in laughter at Mommy's rocking and tickling are that kind of treasured moment. Always take proper caution for you child's safety, but do enjoy exciting, rumble-tumble fun.

Places to learn and activities to enjoy **AWAY FROM HOME**

Taking a walk in the neighborhood

- Play “Follow the Leader.” Take turns being the leader as you romp along in lots of different ways—marching, jogging, waddling like a duck, taking “giant steps” or “baby steps,” swinging your arms back and forth or flapping them like wings, clapping your hands high above your head in time to your steps, and many more!
- Take advantage of the interesting movement possibilities you might spot every day along your walking route. Are there low retaining walls your little one can balance on, taking tiny “tightrope” steps as you hold his hand? Are there manhole covers she can leap over or sidewalk heating grates she can dance on? Are there various interesting surfaces—such as bumpy cobblestones, puddle-dappled sidewalks, or lush grass—that a just-learning-to-walk baby would love to toddle on and explore?

Playground or park

Here’s where your perpetual-motion toddler finds a world of movement opportunities:

- How many different ways can you find to get from the top to the bottom of the slide?
- How many different ways can you play on the swings? (Hint: It’s even fun to ride sitting face-out or backwards on Mommy’s lap!)
- With a good dose of imagination, playground climbing structures can represent anything from a pirate’s ship to a princess’s castle—so join your child in pretending as you climb and play.



Visits to friends and family

- Your little one can come to look forward to the interesting movement possibilities provided at all the different places you visit regularly. She might love long-jumping from one stepping stone to the next in Aunt Tillie’s garden. He might relish the fun of climbing and swinging in Grandpa’s rope hammock. She might take every chance to roll down the grassy hill in a neighbor’s back yard. He might treasure the mystery of climbing up and down Granny’s folding attic stairs. In other words, look at the surroundings wherever you go, for ways your child can discover and experience all the child-friendly movement possibilities they offer.
- Plan for active play when you take your child to a play date with a friend. Check ahead to see if bringing along your child’s tricycle would make it possible for the little pals to work off some energy peddling around together. Other fun vehicles for little ones are toy wagons they can take turns riding and pulling.
- Organize a “wheelbarrow race.” One child lies on the grass, tummy down. When a partner lifts the child’s legs like the handles of a wheelbarrow, the prone child pushes up, supporting his weight on his arms, and “walks” forward on his hands. How fast can this silly wheelbarrow go?

Other community resources

- Find out if there are toddler play groups you might join in your community.
- Many community centers offer programs like baby gym classes and mother/child exercise classes that provide active movement and fun with other small children.
- Watch the local news for announcements of community festivals and school fairs. These events often include special opportunities for small children who love to move. Your little one might delight in the inflatable play environments set up at many festivals. These consist of a large, pillowy, inflated surface surrounded by a combination of netting and inflated walls so children can crawl, bounce, and tumble safely.
- Community swimming pools are great resources for active babies and toddlers, particularly if they have a wading pool just for tots. As your little one grows familiar with the water she can explore endless ways to move and splash through it.

