

Supporting Children's Physical Activity in ECE Settings Presenter Notes

Overall Notes

This presentation is meant to be very discussion based, with much input from participants. As such, it is important to set an inclusive tone from the beginning of the presentation so that participants feel comfortable sharing their opinions and experiences with the group. If helpful, you can set ground rules to remind participants to be respectful of each other and remember that all participants bring a unique perspective that is helpful to spark discussion.

Slide 1

Remember to start with an icebreaker so that the group can get to know each other. For example, have each participant tell one reason why you love being a child care teacher and a favorite classroom tradition.

Slide 2

List out the learning objectives for participants so that they can understand what they will gain from the presentation.

Slide 3

Ask teachers to think about and share how they would define physical activity.

Note that physical activity is really active play for children. This looks different than in adults, who we think about getting physical activity mostly through exercise. We might think about physical activity as just things that are really vigorous (like running full speed), but things like walking, skipping, hopping, jumping, and marching also count as physical activity. It's important to remember that ALL of these things have benefits, and children need a variety of activity in their day for different reasons. To help us think about the different levels, we use terms like sedentary time, light, moderate, and vigorous activity. Each of the pictures on the slide corresponds to the category of physical activity that we use.

Slide 4

In the last slide, there was a discussion about what physical activity is and what it looks like for young children, but why is it important? (Let group brainstorm) It is helpful to think about the benefits in these overall categories- benefits related to physical health, social and emotional health, and academic benefits. Go through each of these benefits if not discussed by group initially. Specifically, point out that developing gross motor skills is an important benefit of activity but is certainly not the only one. Physical activity can benefit the whole child, and sets up the child for a healthy future!

Slide 5

Thinking more about children's activity, participants probably have seen this in their classrooms. Children are also different from adults in that, for the most part are active on their own and get their activity through shorter spurts of high energy. It's important to remember this when teachers are planning for physical activity throughout your day. It's less likely to be successful if you plan long blocks (15 minutes or more) for physical activities. Also, this might be important to remember when children seem to stop paying attention for an activity, since children can lose their focus on an activity after a short time. It might just be that you need to take a break, do a quick activity to let kids get out their energy. Then, when you go back to the activity you were originally doing, the kids will likely be able to pay more attention.

Another way to think about children's activity is by who begins the activity, just as how we think about children's learning. Structured activity, like the one in the picture to the left is teacher- or parent-directed. In your classrooms, this can be with individual children, small groups, or an entire class. This is different from unstructured, or child-directed physical activity. Ask participants why they think it's important for children to have both types of activity throughout their day? And, where do you they children should get each of these types of activity?

Note that children should have a balance of both structured and unstructured physical activity. Unstructured physical activity allows children to explore their sense of independence and find types of active play that they are naturally drawn to, facilitating their creativity. Structured physical activity is important to help children learn gross motor skills and to help them learn to appreciate physical activity by seeing their teachers lead physical activity.

Slide 6

Ask participants, now that they know why physical activity is important, how much physical activity do children typically get during a normal child care day? This graph shows data from a recent study done by a group of researchers in Seattle. They found that children are spending the majority of their time being sedentary. Even if we take a loose definition of physical activity, including moderate activity levels, they are getting 1 hour 45 minutes of activity each day. The 280 minutes of sedentary time (4 hours and 40 minutes!) does include meal and nap times, but even if we account for that, there is still a lot of sedentary time happening within a normal child care day. Some of this time we wouldn't expect to go away, like meal and nap time, along with some of the learning activities that happen at child care. So, we don't think that all of this would go away necessarily. But, this is a LOT of time! And, remember that for some children, the only physical activity that they'll get is at child care, so this is important!

Paper citation: Tandon, Pooja S., Brian E. Saelens, and Dimitri A. Christakis. "Active play opportunities at child care." *Pediatrics* 135.6 (2015): e1425-e1431.

Slide 7

Now that participants have had a chance to understand how much physical activity children are getting in centers, it's helpful to put that in context with how much activity they should be getting. There are many groups that have their own recommendations for how much physical activity kids should get every day. One that we often use in the research literature is the ones from the National Association of Sport and Physical Education, which recommends 120 minutes of physical activity throughout the day, with half being structured and half unstructured. Also, NASPE recommends outside time daily for children. Remind participants that these recommendations might seem like a lot of time for physical activity, but later in the workshop there will be a chance to think about how they can add in activities throughout the day that eventually add up to the 2 hours recommended. And, remind them that this 2 hours can come both inside and outside.

Ask the teachers to think about their center or other centers they've worked in, how can different parts of the child care environment influence how much physical activity children get while at child care?

Recommendation citation: National Association for Sport and Physical Education. Active start: A Statement of Physical Activity Guidelines for Children Birth to Five Years. 2nd ed; 2002.

Slide 8

To think about the ways that centers can create a healthy environment supporting children's physical activity, it's helpful to think about different opportunities within the ECE setting according to the 3 Ps – provisions, practices, and policy.

Provisions are the things that are provided to children. For physical activity, this is mostly the time that is scheduled for physical activity as well as the physical spaces and equipment available to children.

Practices are any interactions that you as providers have with children that either encourage or discourage children from being active. This includes teachers' words, like when they praise a child for being active, when they say to a child "Why don't you go run around?!", or when they join in a physically active game with children.

Policies are the written rules of a center that are related to physical activity. Generally speaking, policies "back up" the other 2 Ps, since these are the written rules that you're held to within your center.

Ask the teachers "What of these Ps do you feel are more in your control at the classroom level versus those that are determined by your director/owner at the center level? Why, and what might that mean for how you do physical activity within your classroom?"

Slide 9

Ask teachers how they think about their influence over children's physical activity. Do they have any influence at all? If so, where does it happen?

Remind teachers that even if they don't think so, they have a LOT of influence. When children see that teachers make physical activity a part of their day, they learn to enjoy physical activity and that it's part of their normal day. Yes, children are naturally active, but they look to you as their teacher for guidance on everything else that happens during their day, it just makes sense that physical activity is included in this too!

Explain that teachers can both help and harm children's physical activity, depending on their actions. Some things can promote physical activity while others can unintentionally restrict children from being as active as they should be.

Slide 10

Watch the video of teachers interacting with children during physical activity.

Ask teachers what the teacher in the video is doing to influence physical activity and what can they do differently to get the children to be more active. What do teachers typically do in your classroom to help children be more active?

Slide 11

Thinking about scheduling time for physical activity, let's take a look at where physical activity might pop up during a normal child care day.

This mock schedule of a "normal child care day" can help us with this. This might not look like everyone's normal day, but it will do just fine for our conversation here. Where do you all think there are opportunities for children to be active? (Let teachers brainstorm for a while)

Most people focus on outside time as the main source of activity for children. But, there are great opportunities to be active indoors, especially during circle time and center time. Another great place for activity is during the transitions that happen in between activities, like from circle time to center time, or as children are getting ready to go outside or coming back in from outside time. It's not that activity has to happen in all of these areas every day, but it's important to remember that there are many, many chances within the normal child care day to be active with children.

Point out that there are opportunities for both structured and unstructured activity throughout the day, indoors and outdoors.

So, if we add in a little bit here and there, it's easy to see how it can add up to 2 hours of activity each day.

Slide 12

Even though physical activity is important, we know that it is only 1 out of MANY demands that are placed on teachers. Somehow, in the busy day between meeting academic and other developmental objectives, teachers are supposed to find time to do physical activity with children too. And, teachers are supposed to do physical activity with children sometimes with limited space and equipment and while trying to manage a classroom full of excited children.

But, if you think of adding in physical activity bit by bit into the activities that you're already doing, it becomes a lot more manageable to make sure children are getting their 120 minutes each day!

Slide 13

Before transitioning to the next part of the presentation, take a break! Play this video and encourage participants to move along!

Slide 14

For the rest of the presentation, the focus is on how to overcome challenges that might get in the way of increasing the amount of physical activity teachers do in their classroom. A common quote will appear on each slide, and some suggestions to help overcome the barrier. Encourage participants to share any other suggestions they have, maybe ones that they have used in their classrooms.

Slide 15

One challenge teachers might face is that children might not like the physical activities that they choose. If this happens, one way to get over that challenge would be to ask children what they like to play at home, if they are old enough to answer. Otherwise, teachers can try to do different activities until they find ones that children like. But, remind teachers not to rule one out until teachers try it out a few times- kids might learn to like it! Also, teachers can watch what children play with when they are outside, and then they can find physical activities that match the things children like to do.

Slide 16

Another challenge teachers might face is having the resources and equipment to do physical activity. But, it's important to know that you don't need a lot of fancy equipment to do physical activity with children. Teachers and children can try to come up with games to play with the equipment they have (be creative!), or you can try to find a substitute piece of equipment for a

lesson plan when teachers don't have exactly the "right" equipment. Also, remind teachers that children can use their imagination and bodies to have fun during physical activity- try telling active stories, like going on a bear hunt or going on an adventure to the moon!

Slide 17

Classroom management is a challenge that comes up a lot for teachers. Kids can sometimes get too energetic during a game and either put themselves at risk of being hurt or not be able to calm down quickly enough to move onto the next classroom activity. It's important for teachers to remember that physical activity can actually help kids get out their energy so that they're able to focus better on tasks later in the day. It can take time for kids to learn how to transition between activities, so teachers need to be patient as children learn new routines in their day. One thing teachers can do is to have a song that they sing as a "cool down" transition at the end of a physically active game to let kids have a couple minutes before they have to jump into the next activity.

Slide 18

Some teachers might think that it's hard to do physical activity with kids because they don't have time in their schedule. It's easy to think that we need to carve out 30-45 minutes at a time to do physical activity with children, like we did in PE class in school. But, remind teachers that preschoolers are moving around all day. So, instead of trying to find 30-45 minutes just for physical activity, encourage teachers to try to find smaller amounts of time, like 10 minute blocks, where teachers can play an active game with children. Even better, teachers can integrate physical activity into other lessons they're doing, like learning about emotions, rhythms/patterns, getting along with other children in the classroom, and so on. Killing 2 birds with 1 stone is a really efficient way to get to that 120 minutes!

Slide 19

The last of the common challenges we hear from teachers is that there's not a lot of space to do physical activity indoors. Especially when outdoor time is limited, this is a very hard challenge to overcome. If there is a spare room in the center or one dedicated to physical activity, then that is a great place to move physical activity indoors. But, this is not the case for most centers. For times when teachers want to do physical activity in the classroom but are worried about having enough space, one easy way to work around that is to break up the activity into a small group physical activity. Teachers can try to do this during center time, when some children are playing in other areas of the classroom. It's possible that there is enough space in the circle time area to do a small group physical activity as one of the "centers." Also, teachers can consider moving the furniture against the wall to create more open space.

Slide 20

Invite participants to share any other challenges they have had or have heard others have had. Allow everyone to share some potential solutions to those challenges.

Slide 21

Thank everyone for coming, and wrap up with any closing remarks you would like to add.