

## Play Tip 6 - Learning to move..... and moving to learn



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I am sure you will agree that most young children find it very difficult to sit still. At times this can be most frustrating for us adults, especially if we are trying to sit and read with them, or paint or play with dough or do a puzzle alongside them. Very often we are squeezing our very busy schedules to organise such quality time with our little ones and feel quite miffed when they just up and disappear after five minutes (or less!) or perhaps we find ourselves sitting next to a fidgeting, wriggling child who is having difficulty 'tuning in'!

What you might be surprised to learn is that there is a reason for their desire to move around. When children are born they are **programmed** to move and explore in order to learn about the world around them; how things work and how things relate to each other. Babies sit and reach for bricks, toddlers start to walk and suddenly the most interesting thing in their world are the contents of your kitchen cupboards! Pre-schoolers may run up and down the garden with their friends pretending to be Batman.

Importantly, movement is critical to the intellectual, emotional and social development of a child, not just their physical development. Many research studies have shown that being active actually stimulates the brain, aiding concentration and information retention.

As parents we need to let our children move around more even if they are playing with toys and games that we intuitively think they should sit still to do, like a puzzle for example. If your child wants to wonder off half way through a puzzle, simply put the partially completed puzzle somewhere where they can still access it and let them go.

You'll be surprised how often they'll come back to it to add more pieces. Eventually they might even complete it, and they'll feel much more satisfied having done it in their own time.

Of course, children do have to learn that sometimes they do have to sit quietly; but be happy to keep sedentary play sessions short and sweet!

Use their need for activity to make learning fun!

When your child is active and fidgety, if you think about it, you'll come up with an idea that will help you use this energy in their play. For example, instead of sitting your child down with a pencil and paper, perhaps give him some paints and let him stand in front of an [easel](#). Or give him some coloured chalks and let him loose in the garden. He will be able to practice his mark-making, but in a context that fits with his need for activity and he will therefore enjoy more. (When my children were small, I had a friend who used to give her children a bucket of water and a paintbrush on hot summer days and let them paint the fences with water – over and over again!)

If you want to do some reading but they are full of beans, choose a book about movement, such as [The Animal Boogie](#) and let your child romp and dance to the words. She will be learning that books are FUN and fit with her needs, rather than sitting and listening with you to a book, which she may struggle to do and which may turn her off books altogether!

Of course, facilitating physical development is another good reason to encourage and support their need for movement, both indoors and outdoors. Did you know for instance, that before children can gain control of the fine finger muscles needed to grip a pencil and write, they must first develop their shoulder and their arm muscles properly. So lots of throwing with toys like our [tumbling band](#) or [skittles](#) or swinging a [skipping rope](#) will ultimately help their literacy development... **and** its fun!!

Movement and activity are a key part of the learning experience, so next time your little one is keen to be up and about, remember that they have to do it! They can't help it and it's not their fault. More than this; it's good for them!

My next playtip will look at the importance of creativity in your child's development, how you can help foster this and why 'creativity kits' are not the answer!

Best wishes

Sally.

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