

Managing and Leading Structured Physical Activity: Teacher Tips for Success

Active play time should be a happy time for both children and adults, yet most preschool teachers and caregivers have probably experienced a time when the activity became out of control and behavior issues took the fun out of it. You can learn to organize, plan and manage physical activity to prevent many problems before they start.

You do not have to be a PE teacher to effectively lead children in physical activities. Practice these suggestions and watch your teaching skills improve along with the children's motor skills.

- 1. Be Prepared.** Learn how to do the activity before you try to teach it to the children. Make sure you have enough of the equipment and materials needed for all children to participate. It's also good to have another activity planned in case the original plan does not go well.
- 2. Arrange Your Space.** Whether indoors or outdoors, have clearly marked boundaries to show children where they can be during the activity. Clear the space of any obstacles that might get in the way. Make sure there is enough space for the number of children in the group to move without crashing into each other.
- 3. Choose Activities that Keep the Children's Interest.**
 - Preschoolers like to imitate what adults do. One example is to give them a "steering wheel" (Frisbee or plastic plate) and let them "drive" through a course on the playground.
 - They like to do things that show how strong or how fast they are.
 - If an activity is exciting and fun, children will want to do it over and over.
- 4. Teach the Activity.**
 - Have children sit in their own spot to listen to instructions.
 - Give short, simple instructions by telling and then showing children what to do.
 - Continue to demonstrate the activity by doing it with them.
 - Once you teach the basics, give children some options and allow them to make some of their own rules.
 - Have a clear beginning and end to the activity. Music can be a good signal to start and stop. Teach a command that always means stop. "Freeze!" is a good example.
- 5. Give Prompts and Cues.**
 - Use verbal and visual cues to encourage and constructively correct children's movements. "Let's try holding out both arms to catch the ball!"
 - Focus on success. Even if a child is not able to do an activity well, praise him for trying and comment on any progress. "Look how much farther you threw the ball this time!"
 - Teach children to cheer for other children and be excited when they see their classmates succeed.
- 6. Find the Right Level of Difficulty.** Activities should provide a challenge for the children, but still allow them to succeed. Smaller or younger children in the group should have the opportunity to carry less weight, jump shorter distances, throw to a closer target and move at a slower pace than their older peers. Children with greater skills should be given harder tasks to keep them from getting bored. All children, regardless of ability can participate in some way.
- 7. Talk to the Children.** Ask them how they feel at the end of an activity. Explain how being active helps their heart and other muscles. Let them know that sweating and breathing hard is normal and is good for their bodies.