

Developing Children's Physical Literacy

Agility Balance Co-ordination

Being physically active throughout life depends on an individual's ability to feel competent and confident in an activity setting. This competence and confidence normally comes from having developed physical literacy skills as a child.

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WHAT IS PHYSICAL LITERACY?

Physical literacy is the ability to use a range of fundamental movement skills¹ in a competent manner, with the capacity to apply them with confidence in a range of settings that can lead to sustained involvement in sport and physical activity².

Physically literate children will be able to perform a range of

fundamental movement skills e.g. hop, climb or catch at levels of agility³, balance⁴ and coordination⁵ appropriate to their capabilities. A child's movement confidence will develop as they become more competent in performing these skills.



WHY IS PHYSICAL LITERACY IMPORTANT?

Physical literacy is essential for children's:

- Lifelong involvement in sport and physical activity⁶; and
- Long-term health and well-being.

Developing the skills of physical literacy, literacy and numeracy are prerequisites for thinking, learning and interacting in personal, social and work contexts throughout life.

These skills can empower and enable all children to fulfil their potential and access to a whole range of valuable experiences in life as they continue their journey to become informed, responsible and healthy citizens.

Physical literacy is therefore a key to learning as well as personal growth and enjoyment. In line with the definition of physical literacy the following attributes will be nurtured through its development.

Figure 1: Physical literacy as a key to learning, personal growth and enjoyment



- 1 Fundamental movement skills can be classified as object control, locomotor and body management skills
- 2 Sport Matters: Northern Ireland Strategy for Sport & Physical Recreation 2009-19
- 3 Agility is the movement of the body at speed when it is both balanced and coordinated, An Introduction to the fundamentals of movement, Sports Coach UK - The National Coaching Foundation, 2009, P32
- 4 Balance is a state in which a body or object remains reasonably steady and stable, reference 3 above
- 5 Coordination is the skillful and balanced sequencing of the body and its segments to produce movement of the body and generate force, reference 3 above
- 6 Lifelong Involvement In Sport & Physical Activity (LISPA) theoretical framework for sports development, reference 2 above

HOW CAN PHYSICAL LITERACY BE DEVELOPED?

Physical literacy needs to be actively developed through a range of appropriate opportunities as it is unlikely to occur naturally as part of normal growth.

Figure 2: Opportunities for developing physical literacy

All of these opportunities should be child-centred, positive and inclusive, and take place in a supportive, interactive and encouraging environment.



WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR DEVELOPING PHYSICAL LITERACY?

As Figure 2 illustrates, the development of physical literacy is not confined to one setting and therefore responsibility for developing physical literacy is not confined to one particular individual or organisation. A range of individuals and organisations are required to:

- Encourage children to participate regularly in all of these different opportunities; and
- To create and sustain the different opportunities for developing physical literacy.

As physical literacy is developed in a wide range of environments, parents/carers/family members need to ensure that their child's needs are met. A strong home-school

partnership is essential as schools can provide expertise and regular opportunities, and parents can motivate children to avail of these opportunities and support attendance. Parental/family encouragement is vital for children and young people to participate in the range of opportunities in Figure 2.



CONSEQUENCES OF UNDER-DEVELOPING PHYSICAL LITERACY?

Without the development of physical literacy, many children and young people will withdraw from sport and physical activity and are more likely to become inactive and lead unhealthy lifestyles.

A child who has not developed their physical literacy is likely to be disadvantaged throughout their life course. The inability to perform fundamental movement skills will restrict

their ability to avail of opportunities for both recreational and competitive activity, as they are unlikely to choose to take part in an activity that requires proficiency in the required skills. For example, a child who cannot balance will be disadvantaged when taking part in activities such as dance, gymnastics, games and outdoor sports.

Physically literate children will have the knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes that will enable them to:

- Make active and healthy choices throughout their life that will be beneficial to themselves, others, society and the environment; and
- Assist others in acquiring similar knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes.



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