

PARENTING: Playtime encourages motor skill development

Written by

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(StatePoint) From playing basketball to painting a picture to cutting with scissors, motor skills are at the basis of all of our movements. And while these abilities may be innate, fine motor skills must be developed and refined through practice. Experts say it's crucial for parents to offer children opportunities to reinforce these vital skills.

"From school work to play time, a mastery of motor skills will make a child's experiences more productive and enjoyable," says Dr. Helen Boehm, psychologist and consultant for VTech, a maker of age-appropriate and developmental stage-based electronic learning products for children. "Parents can play a role in helping their children learn these skills."

And while it may sound like work, motor skill development can be fun, says Boehm. Here are some helpful hints for parents on how play and motor skill development can go hand in hand:

- **Play Music:** Whether it's the piano, flute or violin, playing a musical instrument requires the use of fine motor skills. Remind children how much work it takes to become proficient, and encourage them to practice every day.

Aside from being a fun, potentially lifelong hobby and improving self-discipline, playing music can improve coordination as well.

- **Play Sports:** Throwing a baseball, catching a football, doing a cartwheel -- all these athletic feats require great motor skills. Even if children are too shy or are unwilling to join an official team sport, encourage them to spend time outdoors and play a game of catch or tag.

The exercise and fresh air is important for good health and the movements made during free play outside will support large-motor skill development.

- **Play with Toys:** Educational toys can prove very useful toward improvements in motor skills. Look for toys that encourage problem-solving and visual awareness, but are also fun. For

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example, VTech's Switch & Go Dinos provide good opportunities to enhance motor learning while combining two of children's favorite playthings – dinosaurs and vehicles. From a helicopter that turns into a velociraptor to a construction crane that turns into a tyrannosaurus rex, the transformation feature encourages the development of perceptual and motor skills. Jagger the T-Rex also emits dinosaur sounds, moves forward and backward on his own and even responds to 20 voice commands.

More information can be found at www.vtechkids.com/switchandgodinos .

- Play with Paint: Don a smock and get messy! Make sure the house is well-stocked with crayons, paper, markers and paint so children can express themselves creatively while honing fine motor skills.

"Play is the 'job description' of childhood, helping to build the fundamentals for a lifetime of learning," says Boehm. "Make the most of playtime with your children."

From indoor fun to outside adventure, offer children opportunities to build valuable motor skills.