

# PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

(Excerpted with Permission from Roberta Newman. Arkansas School-Age Credential Modules, Series 1, Module 2: *Linking Program Activities to Four Areas of Development.*)

## ***Summary of Needs and Characteristics Related to Physical Development:***

School-age children are going through a great deal of physical change. Their bodies often look and feel differently from week to week, month to month.

- *They want to use, test, refine, and become comfortable with their emerging physical capacities.*
- *They often take physical risks as they use and test out their new physical capacities.*
- *As physical capacities grow, they become increasingly interested in developing physical skills.*

As school-age children grow physically, they work to gain control over large and small muscles. As they mature, they work on coordinating their movements and developing muscle strength.

- *To develop large muscles (gross motor skills), children engage in activities such as walking, running, climbing, jumping, and throwing.*
- *To develop small muscles (fine motor skills), children engage in activities such as holding objects, grasping with the fingers, pinching, and flexing fingers and toes.*
- *To coordinate the movement of their large and small muscles, children employ all of their sense as a guide: sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell.*
- *Most physical skills are developed and refined during the school-age years. Basic physical skills are retained in adolescence and adulthood, but new basic skills are not commonly developed after the age of 12.*

There is a predictable pattern of the development of physical skills. However, the rate of physical development in school-age children is different for each individual child.

- *Generally, gross motor skills begin to develop before small muscle skills.*
- *The general sequence of gross motor physical development begins with learning to control head movements. Learning to control the torso and arms comes next, followed by learning to control legs. For most children, learning to move hands and feet in highly skilled, coordinated ways comes last.*
- *Though most children progress through this sequence, there can be a wide variance in the rate of development, even among children of the same age. One five-year-old may learn to ride a scooter at age five, while another may not master the coordination involved until age seven or eight.*

- *Children with natural physical abilities often develop physical skills earlier than other children. Children whose pattern of physical growth is slower than others may get discouraged when they feel they aren't good at certain sports and physical activities.*

### ***Ways to Support Physical Development in School-Age Programs***

- *Provide lots of opportunities for children to use their bodies in a variety of ways. Include both large muscle and small muscle activities.*
- *Provide an environment that includes a wide variety of resources for children to use as they develop physical skills.*
- *Offer activities that can accommodate different levels of physical abilities and skills.*
- *Develop effective risk management strategies to keep children safe as they learn and practice new physical skills.*
- *Provide additional support, guidance, encouragement, and reassurance to help children develop and maintain self-esteem and self-confidence as they learn new skills and participate in physical activities.*
- *Provide places and opportunities for children to rest and relax to restore energy used during highly active program experiences.*
- *Be sensitive to how children feel about their size or physical development, particularly during periods of rapid growth and change. Encourage less active children to participate in some type of physical activity without pressuring them to engage in highly active sports and games. Monitor highly active children and encourage them to take breaks if they become too active or over-excited during active sports and games.*
- *Offer a balance of competitive and cooperative sports and games.*
- *Provide sufficient food to support children's growing bodies as they participate in program activities.*