

Sensitive Periods: Movement



A kid's got to move. Observing a few minutes at a playground will attest to that. You don't see children sitting around if they have the chance to run, jump, climb, or skip. Children are in a sensitive period of development for movement from birth to about age five-and-a-half.

Around age four-and-a-half, children have a growth spurt where their legs may grow over an inch per month. During this time, it is difficult for children to sit comfortably. They will squirm or refuse to sit in their chairs at the dinner table. They will appear to wander aimlessly about in their preschool classes. At

this time, it is important to allow lots of opportunities for movement such as long walks and other outdoor activities.

Because of this leg growth, children need additional calcium. Many children suffer from leg cramps at night, don't sleep well and end up being very cranky. Be on the look out during this growth spurt. Children can't tell you about their legs cramps because they don't have the language experience in most cases. Additional calcium supplements, stretching and massage will help children (and parents!) get a good night's sleep, and restore pleasant dispositions.

Children love to walk on stonewalls, balance beams or lines drawn on the floor. At a playground observe all the different activities children do. Every movement is fulfilling a basic developmental need. Give your child opportunities to move and learn at the same time.

The need for movement, though, should not be a license to run wild in the house, stores, or restaurants. Purposeful activity needs to direct children's movements.

We need to give activities that engage all the senses of the child and therefore help him or her direct energy for a positive outcome. For example, folding laundry is a purposeful activity. Children can fold laundry and make many trips to put the laundry away. Send them off with one towel to put away and have them come back and get the next one. It

Sensitive Periods: Movement

may take twenty trips, but they'll love it, especially when a big pile has disappeared.

You can also incorporate movement while sitting and waiting. The preposition game is a quiet game for a restaurant or doctor's appointment. It's simple to play with two objects. In a restaurant I'll use a napkin and spoon. Ask the child to do things such as:

- Put the spoon under the napkin.
- Put the napkin under the spoon.
- Put the spoon near the napkin.
- Put the napkin around the spoon.

Switch roles and let the child give you directions.

In a situation that allows more movement, use a book and table in the same manner. "Put the book under the table. Place the book near the table."

Change the prepositions using words such as over, above, near, through, far, around, between and for the more adventuresome, adjacent, tangent, perpendicular, horizontal, vertical, intersecting. Dig out that old geometry book!

This game helps the child learn that certain words (prepositions) show the relationship between two or more objects.

Have a good time and laugh at all the funny relationships you can describe for the objects. Each request is a walk across the room and directs movement in a purposeful manner.

A key to a happy child, and thus a happy parent, is using purposeful activities to allow movement that aids development. Household chores and word games give children purposeful movement. Your children will have chances for movement along with learning responsibility for a cheerful home life.