



From Motor Skills to Sports Skills

Children in the 2- to 5-year-old age group get their motivation and develop motor skills from self-play behaviors. Active games and play in the backyard, with friends at the park, or in heavily padded rooms can provide great sources of exercise in addition to nurturing that important relationship between parent and child.

Toddlers and preschoolers spend a lot of time just trying to master basic fundamental skills such as running, skipping, kicking, jumping, hopping, catching, and throwing. Kids acquire most of these skills by early elementary school.



Adults may not be able to understand that these activities really do take some effort for children. Much of the maturation process of controlling movement in children involves being able to move in different ways without falling over. Obviously, mastering those basic skills is a fundamental step children have to complete before they can proceed much further.

Infants may rely mostly on visual and oral information, but toddlers move away from the mouth being Command Central. They begin to process signals and cues from their brains and inner ears that may even cause a temporary decrease in their ability to maintain good balance as they approach their fourth or fifth birthdays.

Children can become overloaded with these signals while walking or running, and they must concentrate just to stay upright. Putting all of their attention into balance control may temporarily interfere with their ability to improve performance in other skills if there are other variables in the environment, such as many other players or uneven playing surfaces. Certainly with time, the act of jumping up and down and running around becomes easier without requiring as much focus to stay vertical.

If we could see what is going on in the minds of some young children, it might be very educational. While adults are yelling, "Get the ball! Get the ball!" the child may be thinking, "Don't fall down! Don't fall down!" That is why early soccer teams have been referred to as *beehive* soccer—many players simply swarm and follow the ball just trying to kick it, much to the dismay of the coach, who realizes that none of them are following the instructions of the detailed play outlined just moments before.

There is obviously a wide range of abilities in this age group, but relatively few children are really talented at these basic skills. It has been found that fewer than one third of 2- to 5-year-olds are truly effective at throwing and catching.

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