

Outlets

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Playing is an imperative activity in a child's developmental growth. Play for a child provides an opportunity to release energy, gain feelings of mastery, and learn important social skills, about space and time, and about the world around them. Since children cannot think in an abstract nature, their means of thinking and communication is expressed in a concrete manner. Play is a means for concrete expression of the child, and is therefore very important in their emotional development.

Physical activities are also an important implementation in the child's life. Physical activities can take the role of "play", promote physical well being for the child, and is a good outlet for energy. In fact, many discipline problems with young children arise over restraint of physical activities. The following are some of the statements we find ourselves repeating:

"Don't run-can't you walk like a normal child?"

"Don't jump all over."

"Sit up Straight."

"Why must you play so wild?"

"Just sit still already!"

If we find ourselves repeating these types of statements, we could possibly be inhibiting and restraining our child of their need for physical activities. These limitations in young children can result in emotional tension, aggression, misbehavior, and defiance. As we have previously discussed, discipline problems can be solved by creating a plan of action before the problem comes up, and understanding the needs of the child. Physical activities are a prime- but frequently overlooked-condition for good discipline in children and for an easier life for parents. Children need motor activities both for their mental and physical health. We had discussed in the article *Creating the Right Bridge from School to Home*, the concept of positive stress and 'distress' (counterproductive stress). A long hard day can result in built up distress in the child and create a need for the child to release this energy.

However, the problem that many parents argue is that allowing the child to release their energy in the home can turn their houses upside down. In addition, there are times that it is simply inappropriate for the child to be getting energy out, such as homework time or dinner time. The answer to this dilemma is creating a plan of action. We need to make sure that our children have setup in their weekly schedule a means for healthy outlets in order to release their energy. This will prevent their need to release their energy on their siblings, when it is not appropriate, or on our dining room furniture.

We must find a suitable environment for the child to release their energy. Each child is different in their interests and to how much physical activities are needed. Each parent must assess accordingly. Some opportunities for children's physical activities are playing ball, jumping rope, running, swimming, karate, ice-skating, sports, gymnastics, dancing, exercising, yoga, roller-blading, scootering, skateboarding, or bicycling.

Games, music, and exercise can also be used as means to soothe the child and create a forum for the child to calm down. However, parents should monitor and prevent an incessant involvement with certain activities, especially video games, TV, movies, and internet. These types of games can be addicting if abused, and can eventually tear them away from the world around them and away from success in their learning and school studies.

Mrs. Stern , a junior high school teacher, who understands the needs of each child on a cognitive, emotional, and a social level, has created a plan in her class in order to maximize the success of the students. She has created a contract with her students that express a stipulation that if a student designates a specific time one night a week specifically to physical energy, then she will exempt that child from homework that night.

Her philosophy, based on her true understanding of education, is that in order for teachers and parents to be successful they must understand the needs of the children, and what it takes to help them reach their full potential. Mrs. Stern understands that in the long run, her students will be equipped with the energy and enthusiasm to be successful in school. She understands that a child who is overwhelmed, and dumped with loads and loads of work without a proper outlet, just creates a student who is completely distressed, resentful of school and learning, defiant, and burns out very quickly. However, a children who learn how to properly regulate their emotions, physical health, and maintain a healthy outlook in learning, can ultimately have what it takes to maintain a successful life socially, emotionally, spiritually, and even monetarily.