

# The A, B, C's of physical literacy

Toddlers are so super cute when they're just learning how to play. That stage where they're learning how to hold a ball, for example- they don't know what to do with it, but its round and bouncy and fun.

"Throw it this way," you might say, and they'll throw it to the ground and grin.

"Here you go! Catch," you might encourage as you gently toss the ball back to them, then watch as they let it bounce off their chest and to the ground before looking at you and giggling.

They're adorable, but not really physically literate yet, and it takes a little practice.

## What is physical literacy?

Just like we teach our children their letters so they will one day be able to use them to spell, kids need to learn some fundamental movement skills in order to be confident in physical activity and sports later on. The development of these basic skills is physical literacy, which also includes learning how to "read" and react appropriately in activity environments; so when you toss your child the ball, the hope is that they'll eventually know to try and catch it.

There are a number of movement and sport skills which experts say children should be exposed to on land, snow, water and air: running, balancing, jumping, skipping, swimming, skating, throwing, kicking and catching among them.

Some of them they'll learn as babies and others they won't learn until they're four or five.

Thankfully, my son started his physical literacy journey early with his dad, a former semi-pro hockey player who can skate and throw and catch as well as he can walk. For me as a child, it wasn't as easy. Some things came naturally, like running, dancing and balancing, but when it came to certain sport skills, I had to work harder. I may or may not have been the kid who let the basketball bounce off her chest until she was 12.

The unfortunate part about that was that it meant I avoided certain activities I knew I wouldn't be good at. By the time I got to high school, I had only ever played basketball when I absolutely had to in gym class, and even a couple years ago, when a group of my girlfriends started a volleyball team, I was the only one who wasn't thrilled with the idea.

## **Not becoming physically literate has its consequences.**

According to Sport for Life, a movement that promotes physical activity and sport, "a child who misses out on developing physical literacy is at a great disadvantage." Experts from the organization wrote in a guide for parents of young children on the topic, "on the playground and in the park, children really like to play with other children who have the same level of skill as they do, and who can keep the game going, and, if you can't keep the game going, you won't generally be asked to join in."

"Being unable to perform even a single fundamental movement skill can seriously restrict later opportunities for recreational or competitive activity."

The good news is, there are things we can do as parents to help our child become more physically literate. Here are some tips, from the Sport for Life experts:

### *For toddlers and young children*

- Play catching and throwing games, starting with easily-held soft objects. Get them to use both their right and left hand when they throw.
- Play balancing games, standing on one foot or walking on painted lines on the ground.
- Encourage them to ride a tricycle, get them on skates, and introduce them to water activities.

### *For kids over six*

- Encourage them to engage in unstructured physical play with their friends every day, no matter what the weather.
- Continue catching, throwing and running games
- Enroll them in sport programs each season and have them try different team positions.
- Focus less on the score, more on having fun.

For some more tips and information on helping your child become more physically literate, visit [Sport For Life](#)