



Department of Early Education and Care

THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS

EEC Child Care Licensing

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE: Gross Motor Activities without Playground Equipment

EEC regulations require children to spend at least 60 minutes per day in physical activity, and require daily outdoor time periods (weather permitting) that include large and small muscle activities. EEC regulations also require that areas underneath and around swings, slides and climbers be covered with an adequate depth of impact-absorbing materials, to minimize the risk of injury from falls.¹

The cost of installing and the difficulty of maintaining impact-absorbing use (fall) zones may discourage some early education and care programs from relying on elevated equipment to support large muscle activities. In that event, there are many alternative activities that children may enjoy and benefit from. Some of those options are included here.

To support large motor activities in toddlers, encourage them to kick, throw, chase and catch. Kicking a large ball develops balance and strength. Catching and throwing develop eye-hand coordination. Chasing after a ball they have kicked or thrown develops balance and strength. Playing “Simon Says” when instructions include “hop”, “jump”, “touch your toes”, and “spin like a top” is a great way to get young children moving, as is riding low “scooter” toys, which children power with their feet. Playing “ring-around-the-Rosie” is also fun for this group, and older toddlers may enjoy a bean bag toss.

Preschoolers can enjoy all of these activities, as well as games that develop strength and coordination like ring toss, tetherball, kick-ball, bowling, croquet, climbing through tunnels, bouncing in an inflatable “bouncy house”, and simple gymnastics. Relay races that use a different “move” for each leg of the race (such as jumping, hopping, twirling, doing somersaults) can be a great group activity, and completing an easy “obstacle course” that includes crawling through a tunnel, jumping over a broom handle, climbing up one or two steps and scooting underneath a picnic table exercises lots of large muscles.

Hop scotch, jumping rope, bouncing (seated) on a large bouncy ball, playing dodge ball and “duck, duck, goose” (or “sit, chill, jet”) are fun for young school age children, as are hula-hoops and soccer. Older school age children will enjoy playing badminton, basketball, dodge ball, soft ball and touch football as well. Exploratory walks and scavenger hunts are enjoyed by children of all ages, if tailored to the developmental level of the children.

¹ Required in all group and school age child care programs, and for playground equipment installed after January 1, 2010 in family child care programs.

With a little bit of imagination, inexpensive equipment and good supervision, you can offer children the benefits of outdoor physical activity without sacrificing fun, safety or your budget.

For additional information and resources for large muscle activities, please see:

- <http://www.eec.state.ma.us/docs/TAHandoutActivateYourFamily.pdf>, for a quick summary of how parents can help, and sample activities;
- <http://www.eec.state.ma.us/docs/TAKidsInMotion.pdf>; for information about motor development at different ages and appropriate toys, materials and activities to support motor development;
- <http://nccic.acf.hhs.gov/fitsource/index.cfm>; for links to a wide variety of physical activity and nutrition resources for child care and after-school providers;
- http://www.fitness.gov/funfit/kidsinaction/kidsinaction_03.html; for information on structured physical activities (without specialized equipment or training) for children from birth through age 5.