

Adding Movement to the Classroom

A WORD ABOUT MOVEMENT

Any change in head position is considered “movement” by our neurological system. It is registered by our vestibular system, and is linked to our body’s ability to maintain an awake, alert and organized state.

Too little movement can result in our brains and bodies tuning out and losing focus. With that being said, productive movement activities within an academic setting should be carefully planned into the daily schedule, expected by the students, have predictable rules and consequences, organized and give enough “bang for the buck”. Just like any change to the routine, your first few attempts at integrating movement into your schedule may be chaotic. Don’t give up. Like any good intervention, give it 4-6 weeks before throwing in the towel.

Some kids have neurological deficits that impair their ability to process movement. As a result, “little” movement activities may feel like being on a roller coaster to their neurological system. Be mindful that although overwhelming, roller coasters are fun – and so these students may seek out MOVE movement than their brains are capable of understanding. Be aware of these children, and be sure to modify your activities so that they do not become overwhelmed. Ask your OT for help and suggestions.

Movement activities can be done just for the sake of getting up and wiggling, but studies indicate that the brain is better able to retain information when paired with a sensory component – so add some play to your curriculum.

As a rule, movement activities that involve a “muscle” component (think resistance – like crab walking, wheelbarrow walking, climbing, etc.), are more organizing to the neurological system that changes in head position without a muscle component (like dancing). Therefore, if you can, add some resistance to your activity. And always end a movement activity with a “cool down”. It can be as simple as 10 slow, deep breaths.

WHY SIT?



The easiest way to add just a little movement to the classroom is to do an activity while standing up. You’ll be surprised at how many kids demonstrate better attention to task, just by being out of their seat. Plus, won’t it be nice to NOT have to say, “Sit in your seat!” for 30 minutes! Don’t stop at standing, have students kneel on the floor, standing with one leg on the floor and one leg kneeling on their chair, stand on one foot, etc.

DON’T JUST WALK

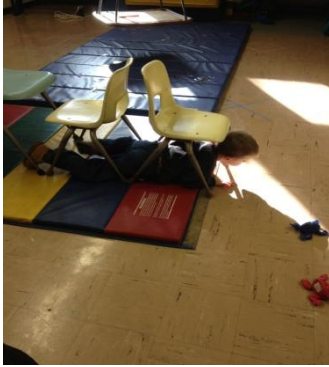


Another easy way to add movement is just to change the way it would typically happen in the classroom. At some point during the day, your students will transition from one area to another – whether it be from their desks to the carpet, from the classroom to the bathrooms, from music back to the classroom. Don’t be afraid to

make that transition fun. If it is expected, organized, discussed and demonstrated – chances are, at least 50% of your students will be capable of organized fun. The easiest way to start is having small groups do it within the classroom, for example to line up for lunch. It’s worth a shot. Here’s some ideas:

- Commando crawling or “swimming” on the floor
- Crab walking
- Bear walking
- Wheelbarrow walking
- Frog hopping

CHAIR FUN



Line up 4 or more chairs in a forward, backward, forward, backward pattern. Have the students commando crawl under the chairs, or climb over the back of the chairs. Utilize this activity as an organized way to transition small groups from one area to another (i.e. the “red” table to the carpet). Make it challenging by seeing what group gets all their members through the fastest, quietest, etc. Make it educational by having students match an academic material from one side to the other . Here’s some ideas:

- Match index cards with vocabulary words to their definitions
- Match lower case letters with their capitals
- Match letters with pictures of their sounds
- Match number symbols to pictorial representations
- Match math equations to their solutions
- Match capital cities to their states

THE ALPHABET STRETCH



One of my favorite warm ups to writing. The lower case alphabet stretch is an organized “dance” to the letters of the alphabet. The rules are simple – if a letter is “sits in the middle”, touch your belly; if a letter is “tall”, put your hands over your head; if the letter is “fall”, touch the floor. It’s a simple movement exercise that starts the students thinking about writing lines and letter alignment before printing.

