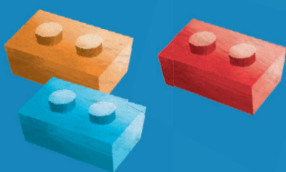


# It's playtime!

Messages regarding  
the implementation  
of joint initiatives  
to foster the development  
of children's motor skills





*It's playtime!*

Title of original document:

*À nous de jouer! Des messages pour favoriser la mise en œuvre d'actions concertées en faveur du développement moteur des enfants*

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Ministère de l'Éducation et de l'Enseignement supérieur

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The mandate of the *Table sur le mode de vie physiquement actif* (TMVPA) is to ensure consistency across organizations devoted to the promotion, adoption and maintenance of a physically active lifestyle. In this regard, many TMVPA members and those working in collaboration with them have embarked on a joint strategy to foster the motor development of children aged nine and under. Stakeholders from various communities are encouraged to make the **environment conducive<sup>1</sup> to physical activity** so that all children can enjoy being active on a daily basis.



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1. Conditions created to facilitate motor development and, by extension, daily involvement in physical activities. To find out more about this subject, see the document entitled *Vision des environnements favorables à un mode de vie physiquement actif* (in French only), <http://publications.msss.gouv.qc.ca/msss/document-000481/>.

## What does this mean in concrete terms?

While most children go through the same phases of development, they do so at their own pace. Handling objects, crawling, walking, running, jumping, climbing, throwing, catching, kicking, dribbling, skipping and balancing are examples of **motor skills** that form the foundations of **motor development**.

The period from birth to nine years old is a crucial stage in the acquisition and mastery of motor skills. These make it possible for children to have more **confidence in their abilities**, which in turn facilitates their social integration and enables them to adopt and maintain physically active lifestyle habits throughout their lives. Hence it is important to offer them as many opportunities as possible to move, explore, interact, take up challenges and enjoy a broad range of pleasant and diverse motor experiences. When they have access to **stimulating environments** conducive to their motor development, children are gradually able to master muscle control, posture, physical coordination and their sense of balance, and can use a host of other skills more efficiently (e.g. balancing on one

**Children develop their motor skills through *play*. In fact, play is an integral part of their everyday lives. It is within this context of *enjoyment* that they develop.**

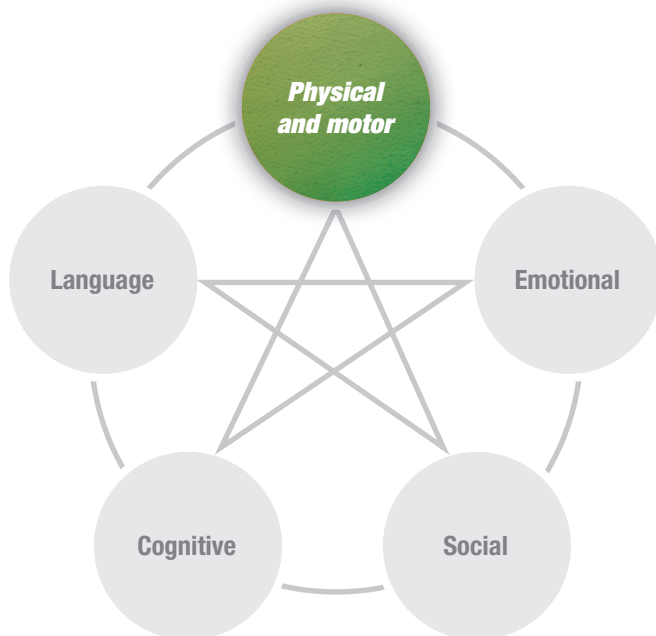




foot, kicking a moving ball).

Motor development has a positive effect on **global development, educational success** and **student retention**. As described in the Gazelle and Potiron reference framework, “motor development does not evolve separately from the other aspects of child development: rather, they are necessarily interrelated. Motor efficiency is, however, a major pillar since it is by moving around and handling objects that young children explore their physical and social environments, and this in turn facilitates their achievements in other areas.”<sup>2</sup>

**Figure 1. The areas of global development**



2. C. Bouchard, *Le développement global de l'enfant de 0 à 5 ans en contextes éducatifs* (Québec: Presses de l'Université du Québec, 2008). Taken from Ministère de la Famille, Gazelle et Potiron: *Cadre de référence pour créer des environnements favorables à la saine alimentation, au jeu actif et au développement moteur en services de garde éducatifs à l'enfance* (Québec: Gouvernement du Québec, 2014), 30. [Translation]

## Why is *unstructured* active play important for child development?

When children are physically active and can decide what to do with the space and objects at their disposal, we say that they are in a free-play situation. There are no set procedures, time limits or rules to follow. Unstructured active play allows children to develop their **autonomy** and **creativity**, among other things. Through it, children discover that they are capable of initiating activities and taking up challenges suited to their abilities and their success in these endeavours has a positive impact on their development. Through exploration, which comes quite naturally to children, they learn to be attentive and persistent, and discover the pleasures of being physically active. In short, unstructured active play enables children to discover the “delightful zone of uncertainty” all by themselves.



## Why is it essential to have children play outside?

The outdoors are very conducive to unstructured active play. The ample space available outside fosters freedom of movement and allows children to explore activities that involve a greater expenditure of energy.

Being outdoors gives children extraordinary opportunities to meet challenges involving the use of all the space around them, including trees, rocks, puddles, etc., in activities of varying degrees of physical intensity.

### *Children, outside!*

**Now more than ever, it is important for human beings, particularly children, to become reacquainted with their natural environment, so that it can once again be a place where life is good and delightful discoveries are possible, a space in which children can invent games spontaneously, cultivate their sense of wonder, enjoy themselves and be in contact with the beauties of nature.<sup>3</sup>**

3. Cardinal, François, *Perdus sans la nature: pourquoi les jeunes ne jouent plus dehors et comment y remédier* (Éditions Québec Amérique, 2010). [Translation]



## What is the adult's *role*?

Adults must ensure that children grow up in a pleasant environment that encourages them to play and move at their own pace. Adults are responsible for providing an environment conducive to unstructured active play and discovery. They make sure that play remains play and is carried out in a pleasant manner that fosters learning. Adults allow children to develop naturally and to initiate their own games. The various features of children's environment should spark their curiosity, encourage exploration, stimulate their creativity and imagination, and help them learn about themselves and others.

**Adults observe.** They provide children with any needed support but do not act in their place. Adults sometimes encourage children's initiatives and bolster their competencies. Adults' attitudes and behaviour must be suited to children's various **phases of development** as well as their **needs**.





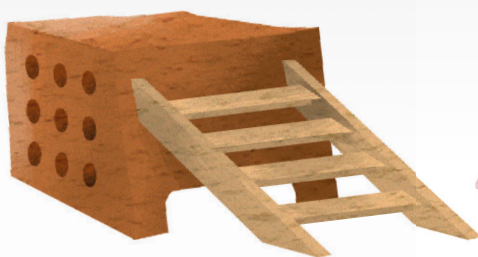
**Babies** are active from birth. As they grow in awareness, they discover the different parts of their body and learn to control them and their immediate environment. At this early stage of life, children try to grab and handle surrounding objects from a supine position. Free to explore, they discover various motor possibilities by turning their heads, extending their arms, rolling over onto their stomachs, grasping onto things, climbing and, later, crawling. Adults encourage them by surrounding them with age-appropriate, eye-catching toys.

The environment of **very young children** must enable them to carry out **diverse** activities that spark their interest. This way, children develop their spatial perception and orientation skills, and discover that they can do things by themselves.

The adult's role is, therefore, to allow children time for active and unstructured play, especially outside. This way, they can acquire new skills and play in ways that sustain their interest.

As **young children** grow, the activities that foster their self-esteem and enable them to socialize and be with others take on a whole new meaning. While developing their motor skills, they learn to integrate them into various contexts created by adults and to adapt their **actions** to a variety of situations. Accordingly, adults encourage them to **interact** through cooperation-opposition actions.

**Adults provide young children with opportunities to move in ways they see fit and take risks, i.e. to act on their own without adult intervention. Adults might, for example, allow children to climb or jump from a playground structure in the knowledge that children know how to evaluate the risks involved.**





# What is *the* role of my community?

Many stakeholders from educational childcare services, the school system, and municipal and community services and associations have implemented projects to foster children's motor development. While **concerted action** is important, the steps taken in these communities, and the messages they convey, must also be **complementary** and **ongoing**. In this regard, TMVPA members and those involved in implementing the *Stratégie d'intervention globale en matière de développement moteur chez l'enfant de 0 à 9 ans* have 11 key messages to convey

All those with a stake in this issue are therefore invited to familiarize themselves with these messages and to view the capsules available on the TMVPA website,<sup>4</sup> the objective being to ensure consistency in the messages conveyed with respect to the motor development of children up to the age of nine.

4. [tmvpa.com](http://tmvpa.com)



MESSAGES  
TO PROMOTE  
THE MOTOR  
DEVELOPMENT  
OF CHILDREN

## Outside play!

The outdoors is an environment conducive to active play and rich in challenges year round.

## Active play!

Provide opportunities for children to engage in strenuous physical activities, which are well suited to the nature of the child.

## Unstructured play!

Unstructured play initiated by the child fosters his/her global development and creativity.



## Every day!

Children need to engage in spontaneous physical activities on a daily basis.

## Variety!

Exploring a range of games, activities and sports in various contexts fosters the optimum development of children's motor skills

## Enjoyment

Active play must remain actually playful! And be enjoyable!





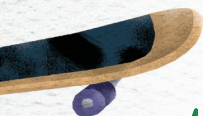
## Self-confidence!

Children who have mastered the basic motor skills can engage in a wide range of activities more easily and derive more pleasure from them.



## Keep it simple!

Everything in the child's environment can be used for developing his or her motor skills.



## Adapt!

Play and physical activities must present regular challenges adapted to the child's abilities, needs and preferences.

## It's everybody's business!

All of us, without exception, have a crucial role in ensuring the quality of children's play experiences.

## Don't go overboard with safety!

Diversified experiences enable children to develop and apply the habits they need for their own safety. Overprotectiveness can be a real obstacle!





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