



Nurturing Agility, Awareness, & Flexibility

Agility, body and spatial awareness, and flexibility are skills children need to be physically active without losing control, falling, getting injured, or bumping into others. These skills involve:

- ✓ **Agility** is the ability to change direction (forward/backward, up/down or sideways) and speed (fast/slow or start/stop) without losing control.
- ✓ **Awareness** is an understanding of how the body moves and what it takes to make the stop, start, and keep moving. Children with good spatial awareness can also see depth and distance and determine if there is enough room for the body to safely move in different directions or positions.
- ✓ **Flexibility¹** is the ability to move freely through a wide range of motions. Good flexibility protects bones and joints from injury. Poor muscle flexibility can cause children to experience tenderness, pain, or affect a child's fine motor skills, which can cause problems with writing.

YOUR INFANT (birth to 2 years old):

- Dance with your child to music. Gently move the arms and legs of your baby to the music. Encourage your standing and walking infant to move his own body.
- Try yoga. Yoga is exercise for the mind, body and spirit. It involves massage and gentle movements of the arms and legs. Yoga movements can be adapted for any age child. To learn more about yoga, consider checking a DVD out of the local library.

YOUR TODDLER (2-3 year olds):

- Show your child how to stretch before physical activities. Get him in the habit of stretching, warming up, and cooling down before/after exercise.
- Play *Musical Chairs*. Set up a row of chairs (one fewer than the number of players) and have children stand in a circle around the chairs. Play some music. While the music is playing, the players walk around the chairs. When the music stops, everyone races to sit down in one of the chairs. The player who is left without a chair is eliminated from the game, and one chair is also removed to ensure that there will always be one fewer chair than there are players.
- Play games that teach position (over, under, next to, behind), direction (forward, backward, sideways), and speed (fast, slow): Give your child blocks; prompt her to place the blocks based on a specific position word. Or, ask your child to run, walk, or jump in different directions or speeds.

YOUR PRESCHOOLER (4 year olds):

- Ask your child to stretch his body into the shape of a letter of the alphabet. Try to guess the letter.
- Do the *Limbo!* Hold a broomstick at chest height. Tell your child to travel under the stick by leaning backward without letting her body touch the ground or the stick. Lower the broom slightly each time she successfully passes underneath the stick.
- Play *Rabbit & Hound*. Place cones, beanbags, or other objects in any arrangement around the yard or room. Tell your child that she is the "hound" who must chase and try to catch or tag the "rabbit" (you); the hound should give the rabbit a five second head start and follow the pattern that the rabbit makes through the cones or objects. When the rabbit is caught, switch roles.
- Play *Four Square*.² Draw a large square in chalk on the sidewalk; divide it into four sections. Label each of the four 'boxes' with a number or letter. Call out the numbers or letters, having your child jump from box to box as quickly as possible.

Book Suggestions

Finders Keepers by Julie Orr • Play Ball, Amelia Bedelia by Peggy Parish and Wallace Trip

¹ Eric Carson, "Child's Flexibility Issues," Live Strong.com <www.livestrong.com>.

² Palmer, Paisley. "Kids Agility Games." <http://www.ehow.com/list_6459261_kids-agility-games.html>