

## 5-1 Physical education: building healthy bodies

The important issues in early childhood include whether a child can practice particular daily habits and participate in physical activities, both of which contribute to building a healthy and safe lifestyle. Mastering daily habits and hygiene precautions will strengthen the child's health, while acquired physical and sensory skills will allow a quick response and action to an unexpected event, helping the child to avoid any possible danger.

### Practicing daily habits

Practicing daily habits means learning particular behaviors necessary for building a foundation for rich social interaction, and for a healthy, safe lifestyle. By fully engaging in mental and physical activities and actively practicing daily habits required in early childhood at kindergarten, children can develop their sense of self-competency and learn the essential rules in school environment, further forming a basis for social life.

#### Educational goals

- **Understanding the meaning of greetings that underpin harmonious human relations, those in the morning, afternoon and evening, those in the scenes of first acquaintance and farewell, and those expressing apology and gratitude.**
- **Developing physical and mental health in early childhood through practicing daily habits.**
- **Mastering daily habits through frequent practices at both kindergarten and home.**
- **Fostering self-competency.**
- **Understanding that acquired daily habits leads to clean and safe life.**
- **Realizing that happy school life requires observation of daily habits.**
- **Developing self-reliance and self-competency through the behaviors based on daily habits.**

## Activities to practice basic daily habits

### Greetings

Communication usually starts with greetings.

The way people greet differs across countries, but sincere words and a smile are universal and always connect people.

While exchanging morning greetings, the teacher checks how the children look (e.g., cold or tired), and how they feel (e.g., excited or upset), by looking at the face and body of each child.

### Hand-washing

Hand-washing is a key practice to maintain healthy life.

Daily hygiene precautions are essential measures to keep infectious diseases away. Hand-washing can protect children from harmful germs.

Thorough hand-washing involves soaping one's palm, between fingers, and tips of nails.



## Gargling

Children need to gargle well especially upon coming back from the outside or dusty places.

Children should be aware that gargling can prevent them from catching a cold.

Use of slogans can be a good idea: 'Rinse' for your teeth; 'Gargle' for your throat.'



## Bathroom

The bathroom is for everybody.

Children should be instructed to consider others who use the bathroom later and to use the bathroom neatly.

Bright drawings and tiny little flowers can brighten up a dim, boring bathroom.



### **Putting personal belongings away**

Putting one's belongings and shoes away at designated places is a first step toward self-reliance.

Children learn that in the shared environment of kindergarten they can have their own places and that organizing things is one of the important rules for a member of the group.

Identify the places by name labels or stamps and let children respect their own places as well as those of other children.

### **Tidying up**

The way that things are set up creates expectations about forthcoming activities.

As a result, doing any activity can be a fun, exciting, and engrossing experience. Yet tidying up cannot be fun, can it?

A teacher needs to teach children that the activity will not be over without tidying-up, which sets up things for others or for the next occasion.

## Trash

Children should experience how comfortable it is to stay in a clean, well-organized room after the trash is thrown away and the floor is swept.



## Rest time

Rest time is a crucial moment for active young children.

Each activity needs to be accompanied by rest time.

Also, by guiding children to wipe sweat if they are hot, to take off or put on layers of clothes if they are hot or cold, and drink water in the midst of activities, a teacher can encourage children to adjust their physical condition to the environment.

## **Keep in mind**

- The goal of teaching daily habits is to develop a healthy and safe lifestyle. However, it is important to remind children that custom may vary across and within countries and regions due to differences in culture, tradition, values, and social environment.
- Guide children to practice appropriate and necessary habits in various situations.
- Each child has different experiences and level of maturity. Do not hurry. A gradual approach is sometimes very important.
- Greet children cheerfully and show them how effectively words and behaviors can convey sincerity.
- Adjust the height of a basin and arrange soap in such a way that children can use them with ease.
- For children who hesitate to use a toilet or feel anxious about going to the bathroom alone, teach them with patience and discuss the matter with parents.
- Teach children that every activity requires ‘setting-up’ beforehand and ‘tidying-up’ afterward.

## **Tips and suggestions**

- Toilet facilities differ in type and usage across societies and cultures. You need to devise instructions suitable for the custom in your country.
- Provide easy guidance to use bathroom cleanly, especially for small children, such as painting footprints on the floor near the toilet to indicate the position to sit or stand.
- After a length of play, children feel satisfied and fulfilled, thereby willing to tidy up. Check if a play time is sufficiently allocated in the daily curriculum.
- Remind children of the importance of preserving the environment by separating trash into the different ‘Recycling’ and ‘Non Recycling’ bins.
- Shelves and drawers can be marked, with colors or shapes, to show children where and how to return them, for example the items in particular cupboards can be marked with different colors.
- Identify a child’s storage place with a name-label or marking, not only to show which place belongs to whom, but also to make tidying-up easier.

## Developing sensory skills through physical activities

Young children achieve dramatic physical development. While playing, they actively interact with a changing environment and use all their physical skills at this stage. In addition, through playing with enthusiasm and curiosity and exercising the whole body, in relation to their muscle strength, children learn to enjoy exercising their bodies, and so further develop pliant mental functions and motor skills. But at this stage, the coordination of muscle movement is still being developed. Therefore, kindergarten play needs to provide children with opportunities to exercise their whole body through various activities such as running, climbing, jumping, stretching arms and grabbing. When organizing kindergarten curriculum, a teacher should, while considering children's biological rhythm, emphasize activities and lifestyles that help children develop a healthy body with well-balanced combinations of quiet and active play, tension and ease, and play and rest times, by coupling indoor play with outdoor activities.

### Educational goals

- **Sliding down a slope** : Experiencing pleasant, fulfilling feelings when climbing the slope using the whole muscle strength, and when sliding down by balancing the body.
- **Jumping rope** : Practicing with enthusiasm and achieving goals – 'I want to try' or 'I will jump ten times next time.' While acquiring hands and feet coordination, children can feel great satisfaction and achievement through jumping over and over again.
- **Bamboo stilts** : Through attention to and concentration on bodily equilibrium, feeling satisfaction at coordinated movement and developing a balancing skill.
- **Swing** : Enjoying the rhythmic movement, speed, and fun in the air while stretching and balancing the whole body on the swing.
- **Monkey bar** : Developing motor muscles and quick movement through hanging with both hands, swinging the body, and getting used to the height. Fostering motivation to get to the other end, and feeling self-confidence and satisfaction through repeated successful trials.

### **Sliding down the slope**

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### **Jumping rope**

Children make their own ropes after learning how to braid strings.

The rope should reach from a child's toe to the shoulder.



The ropes are hung by children at a name-labeled or marked hook so that they can get them by themselves whenever they feel like using them.

Children are handling their hand-made ropes with great care.

With goals in mind, they invent new techniques and become absorbed in many trials.





### **Bamboo stilts**

To play with bamboo stilts needs a safe place.

Inexperienced children should choose the stilts with lower ledges and step on them with a stool for easier balancing.

A teacher's support can give a child a sense of security which motivates the child to practice balancing and walking with the stilts.



More advanced children can feel confidence and fulfillment by keeping their balance on the higher ledges.

### **Swing**

A child is having a good time on a used-tire swing pushed by her friend.

Children should be kept away from swings in use, by fences or hedges.



### **Monkey bar**

By swinging his body and feet, a boy is moving from bar to bar, and sometimes skips a bar.

Some children can climb up, hang from, and spin around the bar.

When there are many children at the bar, a teacher should instruct them to go in one direction to avoid collision.

### **Disinfecting**

When a child gets hurt, the wound needs an antiseptic.

A teacher, while sympathizing with the child during treatment, supports him to get back to play.

## Keep in mind

- In order that children can play actively and safely, a teacher should provide them with chances to learn how to move with agility and, depending on the situation, to avoid danger. Play areas and toys need to be arranged in accordance with children's activity patterns.
- A teacher should check play equipment every day for any sign of danger, by touching and mounting the equipment, and fixing any broken parts as soon as they are discovered.
- Guide children to become aware of how they look (e.g., cold or tired) and how they feel (e.g., excited or upset), by giving them proper rest time and prompting them to change clothes when they perspire a lot.
- Once children master a certain activity, encourage them to try a slightly harder task.
- To encourage active participation in kindergarten activities, a teacher may sometimes need to show children how to play or help them to feel confident, to facilitate their physical development.

## Tips and suggestions

- In addition to the activities listed above, other physical activities that help to build a healthy body include running, relay races, tag, ball games, and moving to music.
- New activities should be introduced to the kindergarten program in relation to the children's ages and abilities. Create activities that best suit regional settings, which will gain children's attention and make them curious.
- When a fixed play structure is unavailable, children can play with a big tree in various ways. For example:
  - Using a tree as a jungle gym, by climbing, hanging, and hiding behind it.*
  - Making a swing by tying ropes to the branches.*
  - Tying two, upper and lower, tighropes to the trees to play ropewalking. (The distance between the two ropes is about 1.5 m (5 feet) long. Lower rope is for walking, while upper rope is for holding with hands. Rocking the ropes makes the walking more exciting and challenging.)*
- A more skilled child can encourage other children and teach them the skill, which leads to inviting more children to do the activity.