



Physical Education

A fit, well-nourished body is the foundation for a sound mind and strong character. A teacher has the opportunity to inspire students to be fit through **physical education**, physical activities that are taught in schools to promote good health. Physical education regenerates young minds, increases heart rate, and promotes blood flow to all parts of the body. Through physical activity, students discharge surplus energy and often in the process renew energy and feelings of well-being.

Many skills that students develop in physical education activities are the same skills needed for success in the classroom

and the general community. Specifically, students learn to cooperate and communicate with one another. They also learn how to lead, take direction, listen to and encourage one another.

With childhood obesity rising and levels of fitness falling, many Montessori programs schedule time every day when all the students participate in some kind of physical activity that helps develop **motor skills**, the ability to move the body and to control the movement of the body. Most students doing academic work in a Montessori program have many opportunities throughout the day to develop their **fine motor skills**, the small, detailed movements that can be made with the hands and fingers. Physical education activities provide students with opportunities to develop their **gross motor**

skills, the ability to make large body movements such as crawling, walking, lifting, and climbing. Above all, physical education activities provide students with opportunities to be active and have fun.

Did You Know?

- **Tai chi** is a Chinese form of physical exercise characterized by a series of very slow body movements similar to ballet.
- **Yoga** is a Hindu-based routine including breathing exercises, slow stretching, and held postures.
- Once the movements are learned, tai chi and yoga can be practiced by an individual or in a group, as a student chooses, and can be practiced by all members of a class, including children with disabilities who could not otherwise participate in some regular physical education activities.
- Exercises like tai chi and yoga can not only increase physical exercise, but also build mental fitness because the routines and movements require memorization, focus, and self-control to perfect. As an added bonus, such activities link students with their study of history and geography, giving students an opportunity to study practices invented by people in other times and in other parts of the world.



Background Information

With proper preparation, enjoyable exercises, and encouragement for both effort and good citizenship, teachers set the stage for students to have a positive physical education experience. This section provides basic information for the teacher to prepare for indoor and outdoor physical education activities, followed by a series of skill-building, non-competitive activities that are manageable for the average student. Teachers are encouraged to look for and incorporate other appropriate team or group games and activities into their physical education program.

Several topics are important when preparing a lower elementary physical education program:

- establishing boundaries
- establishing teams
- managing time
- creating a cooperative, non-competitive atmosphere

- maintaining safety
- learning physical education techniques

Establishing Boundaries

Establishing clear boundaries for physical education activities will help ensure the students' safety and provide ample space for activities developing gross motor skills. At the beginning of each school year and as often as needed after that — as activities change or as students need reminders — teachers can clearly establish the physical boundaries of the area in which the students will carry out most physical education activities.

To allow for safe movement and maximum room, it is important that the space usually used for physical education activities be kept free of obstructions. An outdoor area for physical education activities can be delineated with existing structures such as posts, trees, or fences. If existing structures are insufficient, rubber cones can be added to mark the boundaries. For indoor physical education activities, a gymnasium or other large room can be used. Some activities can be done in a large, open area of the classroom.

Establishing Teams

Students often stand with their closest friends or form groups with classmates with whom they feel the most comfortable. Having students count off will help to create more diverse teams. If counting-off is introduced at the start of the school year, students will become accustomed to doing physical activities with everyone in the class.

The directions in the following section describe the process for creating four teams in a class of 20 by utilizing the counting-off method. A similar process can be used to create smaller or larger teams, depending on the size of class.

- Ask the students to form a line.
- When the line has formed, ask the students to count off by fours. The student at the start of the line calls out “one,” the student next in line calls out “two,” then “three,” and “four.” The counting restarts with the next student at “one,” and so on. All of the students who were counted off as ones gather to form a team, the twos form a team, and so on. A group of 20 students counting off by fours would create four groups of five.
- Once teams have been set up, each team can be invited to create its own name.



ACTIVITY 3

Participating in Survivor Tag



Purpose

To strengthen the cardiovascular system; to develop coordination and teamwork.

Material

None.

Presentation

- Most Montessori teachers present this activity in Years 2 and 3.
- Announce that the students will have an opportunity to participate in an activity called Survivor Tag.

Warm-Up and Explanation

- Ask the students to stand in a circle, an arm's length apart from one another. Stand in the center of the circle and lead the students in a warm-up.
- After the warm-up, ask the students to listen carefully to the rules of the activity.
- Explain that the object of the activity is to

keep from being tagged by the students who are “it,” but that all students must stay within the established boundaries and hiding is not an option. Emphasize that, for safety reasons, tags should be made only on shoulders, backs, arms, hands, and legs — no tagging on the head, no hitting or slapping to tag someone.

- Explain that to begin the activity, one student will be “it.” When the student who is “it” tags another student, they join hands and become a tagging team. A chain of students who are “it” will form, and that chain, as a team, will try to tag the remaining students. Point out that this chain can only tag from either end, as all other tagging hands are holding the chain together. The activity continues until there is only one student left untagged. That student is declared the “survivor” and becomes the first to be “it” in the next activity.

Activity

- Choose a student to be the first “it” (or ask for a volunteer) and start the activity.
- Continue until there is only one student left untagged, then declare that student the “survivor” and invite him/her to become the first to be “it” as the activity is repeated.

Cool-Down

- At the end of the activity, lead the students in a cool-down.

Participating in Beanbag Run



Purpose

To develop balance, coordination, motor skills, supportive behavior, and fair play.

Material

Two medium-size plastic fitness hoops.

Six beanbags.

Presentation

- Most Montessori teachers present this activity in Years 2 and 3. To minimize any competitive aspect of the activity, set the material up so that the whole class is participating on one beanbag course.
- Announce that the students will have an opportunity to participate in an activity called Beanbag Run.

Warm-Up and Demonstration

- Ask the students to stand in a circle, an arm's length apart from one another. Stand in the center of the circle and lead the students in a warm-up.
- After the warm-up, ask the students to listen carefully to the rules of the activity.
- Explain that during this activity, the students will have an opportunity to run, use correct jumping technique, and try some other fitness challenges as well.
- Point out that one of the fitness challenges is to do sit-ups. Demonstrate the technique for sit-ups (see Background Information section).
- Explain that another one of the fitness challenges is to do push-ups. Demonstrate the technique for push-ups (see Background Information section).
- Show the students the beanbags and plastic fitness hoops, then make the beanbag course: Place one plastic fitness hoop at the starting point. Toss the first beanbag on the ground approximately 10 ft (3 m) from the starting point. Place the other five beanbags progressively further from the starting point, leaving at least 10 ft (3 m) between each beanbag. Place the second plastic fitness hoop at the far end of the beanbag course to mark the turnaround point.

- Ask the students to watch closely while you demonstrate the course they will follow:
- Jump into and then out of the first plastic fitness hoop using the jumping technique from The Hoppers activity.
 - Run to the first beanbag, staying to the left when passing it.
 - Run to the right of the second beanbag, stop, and do five sit-ups.
 - Run to the third beanbag, staying to the left when passing it.
 - Run to the right of the fourth beanbag, stop, and do five push-ups.
 - Run to the fifth beanbag, staying to the left when passing it.
 - Run to the sixth beanbag, staying to the right when passing it.
 - Run to the plastic fitness hoop at the turnaround point and jump in and then out of it, again using the jumping technique from The Hoppers activity.
 - Run back to the first plastic fitness hoop, staying clear of the beanbag course, and sit at the end of the line of students.
 - Ask the student at the head of the line to step up to the first plastic fitness hoop.

Activity

- Have students sit in a line approximately 10 ft (3 m) back from the first hoop, perpendicular to the course, so that those students waiting for their turn can see their classmates and cheer them on.
- Explain that once the first student reaches the fourth bean bag, another student starts the course, then when that

student reaches the fourth bean bag, another student will start, and so on. The activity will be complete when every student has run the course three times (this can vary).

- Ask the first student to start after you give the signal, “Ready, set, go!” Give the signal.
- Each time a student reaches the fourth beanbag, send the next student sitting in line. This will keep the activity lively and reduce waiting time.

Cool-Down

- At the end of the activity, lead the students in a cool-down.

