



Implementation Guide

Indoor Play

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A photograph of three young children playing on a grey carpeted floor. In the foreground, a girl with dark hair in a bun is building with blue and red LEGO bricks. To her left, a boy in a blue shirt is playing with a green toy car. To her right, another boy in a white shirt and yellow pants is playing with red and green toys. Various other toys, including a red and yellow toy truck and a blue and red toy car, are scattered on the floor. A blue box filled with colorful toys is also visible.

Section 1 Introduction

Thank you for participating in Greaux Healthy's Early Childhood Education Training Series on Indoor Play! This guide was created to help you make lasting changes to your center's indoor environment based on research-based best practices. This guide will provide practical steps, best practices by age group, and strategies for creating an engaging indoor play environment.

Physical Activity

Physical activity is important for children's health and growth, and child care centers play a big role. Regular physical activity helps children strengthen their muscles and bones, improve their motor skills, and keep their hearts healthy. In child care centers, activities like indoor play, games, and group exercises get children moving, which helps them stay healthy and promotes socializing. These activities not only improve children's physical health but also boost their brain power and emotional strength. By offering different ways to stay active, child care centers create a fun and supportive space that helps children develop a love for movement, which can lead to a healthy lifestyle later in life.

Importance of Indoor Play

Indoor play is important in child care centers because it gives children the chance to develop skills in a safe and controlled environment. It helps with cognitive development by encouraging activities that spark creativity, and it also improves both fine and gross motor skills. Indoor play allows children to use their imagination and work together with others, which helps them develop social skills like sharing, communicating, and cooperating.

Taking time for motor skill development is key because these skills are connected to physical growth. For example:



Locomotor Skills

Walking, running, and jumping help children move from one place to another.



Non-locomotor Skills

Bending, twisting, and stretching allow children to move parts of their body without travelling.



Manipulative Skills

Throwing, kicking, and bouncing help with spatial awareness and problem-solving.

These skills are all important for children as they grow and learn how to move and interact with the world around them.

Types of Play

Toddlers and preschoolers' physical activity is usually short and happens in bursts. Children quickly go from resting to high-energy activities and often switch from one activity to another, staying active for only a short time. To support these active moments, children need plenty of opportunities for physical activity.

In child care centers, physical activity often looks like play. For example, games like hide and seek, action songs like "Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes," or playing with toys all encourage movement. There are two types of play in child care centers: free play and guided play. Some children enjoy free play, which is when they choose their own activities. Others prefer guided play, where a caregiver organizes the activity with rules and boundaries. It's important for children to take part in both types of play throughout the day.



Children with Disabilities

Providers should plan, adapt, modify, and model general ways to support students with disabilities.

- Plan activities with parents and healthcare professionals that support a child's strengths
- Adapt by providing equipment that are easier to grip, see, and hear. Keeping items contained to one area can also allow for easy access to the equipment being used.
- Modify the activity and use steady outdoor play equipment
- Model appropriate behaviors by teaching children how to offer help and include children with different abilities in their play



All students need physical activity. There are many ways to adjust so students of all abilities can participate and enjoy!

- Slow down, or reduce the length of time of activities to accommodate students with limited mobility or fitness capabilities.
- Use a smaller play area for less mobile or skilled students.
- Use different kinds of balls that are easier to hold, throw, or see.
- A Goalball has bells inside so that visually impaired students can locate them.
- Whiffle and Nerf balls fly more slowly and reduce the fear of being hit.
- Rackets/paddles with short handles are easier to strike with than those with longer handles.
- Batting tees and suspended balls facilitate hitting or striking activities.
- Provide rule adjustments or extra chances for less-skilled students to allow for greater involvement and skill practice while playing non-competitive games.
- Change how quickly or how long the activity is played to be mindful of all abilities.





Section 2

Research-Based Best Practices

Brief periods of physical activity can add up and it is important to give children daily opportunities to be active in a safe play space. The recommended amount of physical activity for children is 3 hours per day. To help toddlers and preschoolers reach the recommended amount of physical activity centers should target 15 minutes of physical activity per hour.

Guided Play¹

Guided Play is sometimes referred to as Structured play. It is activities that are planned and led by an adult. It sets the foundation for learning how to focus, take turns, follow instructions, and pay attention. Some examples of guided play include follow the leader, musical chairs, hopscotch, or Simon says.

Guided Playtime per Day



Free Play¹

Free play is sometimes referred to as unstructured play and is initiated by the child. It encourages children to be creative and use their imagination and allows them to practice social skills and problem solving. Adults do not set rules for free play.

Free Playtime per Day



Physical Activity Best Practices¹

National guidelines set the minimum amount of physical activity that children should get, but research shows that to really help children develop, child care centers should offer even more chances for active play.

For preschool-aged children, it's recommended they get at least 120 minutes of physical activity each day, both indoors and outdoors. Toddlers should have 90 minutes or more of physical activity per day, also inside and outside.

In addition, all children should have at least 60 minutes of adult-led physical activity, which is structured or guided play. This can be broken up into smaller sessions throughout the day. Children should not be expected to sit still for more than 15 minutes at a time, except during meals or nap time.




Indoor Play Environment

There are some best practices for creating a good indoor play environment, based on research.

- Have separate areas for different age groups with enough space for different activities, and make sure children with special needs can access everything.
- Offer a variety of toys that help kids develop their motor skills, including toys that can be moved around.
- Keep a large selection of posters, books, and other materials that encourage physical activity. Make sure to update or change them often to keep children interested and engaged.

If you want to learn more about evidence-based best practices that you can implement at your center, the Louisiana Dept of Health, Well-Ahead Louisiana offers Go NAPSACC to Louisiana child care centers. Go NAPSACC is an evidence-based platform that allows centers to assess their current practices and make an action plan for change. They also provide videos and resources for changes related to the topic you are interested in.

To access Go NAPSACC, you can go to www.gonapsacc.org for more information!



Section 3 Indoor Play Environment

Your classroom environment is important because it can encourage physical activity! Creating spaces that support movement helps children develop their physical skills and improves their gross motor abilities. It's important to plan activities and set up environments so that children of all ages can explore, learn, and practice moving their bodies.

One key part of the indoor play environment is helping children stay active, even when they can't go outside. You can create areas for dancing, stretching, or playing simple games that let kids burn off energy and work on their coordination. Climbing structures, soft mats, and obstacle courses are great for improving gross motor skills. Smaller spaces for individual or group activities also help children build social and emotional skills. Adding movement-friendly spaces indoors ensures that children stay active and engaged, even when the weather doesn't allow for outdoor play.

Learning Centers

Learning centers are special areas in the classroom set up around different topics, with materials that help kids explore and learn through play.

Setting up your classroom with different “learning centers” has many benefits. It can help reduce discipline problems because each area is for just a few children, making it easier to manage the classroom. Learning centers also create a positive and fun environment for both students and teachers, keeping children busy with hands-on activities as they explore and try new things.

Types of Learning Centers

Here are some ideas for learning centers where physical activity and skill development can be included:



Arts and Crafts Center

Plan art projects that encourage children to draw while kneeling on the ground. This helps them develop their balancing skills while on their hands and knees.



Dramatic Play Center

Add physical activity to dramatic play by giving children resources to pretend they are athletes, yoga teachers, doctors, or characters from stories.



Free Play Center

Provide toys and portable play equipment to encourage movement and help children practice physical skills.



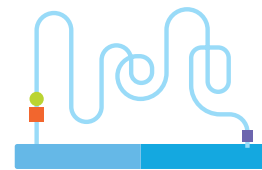
Music and Movement Center

Give children instruments like tambourines and maracas, which encourage both music and movement.



Reading Center

Include books about physical activity. Read them together and give kids the chance to act out parts of the story.



Manipulation Center

Offer toys that help children improve their fine motor skills, like puzzles, playdough, peg boards, beads, and laces.

Case Study: Indoor Play Environment

Let's compare two photos of different child care centers:



Classroom A



Classroom B

Which classroom provides the most supportive physical environment and why?

- Classroom A because they utilize bookshelves and other furniture to break the room into small centers. All visuals are placed at eye level. There is minimal open space, but enough room for all types of activities and materials are easily accessible.

What changes could be made to the physical environment in classroom B to make it more supportive?

- Reduce the clutter and remove computers
- Place visuals at eye-level
- Break the room into small centers



Section 4 Implementation

Quick Wins

Quick wins are small tasks that are easy to do and do not require a lot of time or resources. These tasks often give quick results, make people feel good, and create a sense of achievement. They help build energy and create early successes, which are helpful when you need to make improvements fast or have limited resources. Here are some examples of quick wins that you can try at your child care center to improve the indoor play environment.

Portable Play Equipment

Portable play equipment is a great addition to indoor play areas at child care centers because it offers flexibility and variety for children's physical activity. Items like balls, hula hoops, jump ropes, inflatable structures, or balance beams can be moved to different areas easily. This allows teachers to change the space to fit different activities and needs.

Step-by-Step Guide for Portable Play Equipment

Step 1: Assess indoor space and determine designated play areas. Look at the indoor space and decide where to set up different play areas. These areas will be used for various activities and physical play.

Step 2: Identify and gather necessary equipment. Here's a list of equipment you may need:



Jumping Toys

Jumping toys like jump ropes and jumping balls help improve coordination, balance, and motor skills.



Push-Pull Toys

Push-pull toys like toy trucks, corn poppers, and push-pull cards build muscle, boost spatial skills, and promote cognitive skills.



Twirling Toys

Twirling toys like ribbons, scarves, batons, hula hoops, and parachutes help with motor skill development, balance, body awareness, coordination, and rhythm.



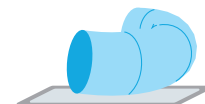
Balance Toys

Balance toys like balance beams and plastic "river stones" help children develop concentration and understand concepts like gravity, counterbalance, and other sports skills.



Throw, Catch, and Strike Toys

Throwing, catching, and striking toys like balls, pom poms, bean bags, and noodles help build hand-eye coordination, motor skills, spatial awareness, grasping skills, problem-solving, and balance.



Crawling and Tumbling Equipment

Crawling or tumbling equipment like mats and portable tunnels help kids develop strength, coordination, flexibility, and balance.

- **Durability and Weather Resistance**
 - Choose equipment that can withstand different weather conditions like rain, sun, and wind.
 - Make sure all equipment is easy to clean and maintain to last longer.
- **Accessibility and Engagement**
 - Ensure that the equipment is accessible for all children, including those with disabilities.
 - Rotate the equipment regularly to keep children interested and challenged.
 - Offer a variety of group activities to encourage social interaction.

Step 3: Implement indoor structured and free play sessions in your daily schedule.

Plan times for both structured play (with guidance) and free play (where children explore on their own) each day.

Step 4: Evaluate and adjust based on observation.

Observe how the children interact with the equipment and make changes if needed to keep them engaged and help them develop new skills.

Active Transitions

Active transitions in child care centers are short activities that get kids moving to help them switch from one part of their day to another, like moving from one activity to the next or going outside to play. These active transitions are important because they make transitions more fun and exciting, help kids release extra energy, improve their focus, and get ready for what's next. Some examples of active transitions are dancing to music, doing jumping jacks, walking like animals, or playing "Simon Says." By adding movement to transitions, kids can practice listening, following directions, and staying engaged, making the whole day feel more exciting. Active transitions also help kids develop coordination, balance, and motor skills.



Step-by-Step Guide for Active Transitions

Step 1: Assess indoor space and determine active transition times.

- **Identify Transition Times:** Begin by identifying key moments in the day when transitions occur, such as moving from free play to circle time, from the classroom to outdoor play, or from snack time to naptime.

Step 2: Establish a routine for active transitions.

- **Create a Predictable Routine:** Children thrive on routine. Ensure that transitions happen consistently at the same times each day. Predictable transitions help children feel secure and prepared for what's coming next.
- **Use Visual or Auditory Cues:** Use songs, bells, or visual cues (like a colored flag) to signal to children that it's time to transition. This helps them understand what's expected and makes transitions smoother.
- **Reinforce Transition Expectations:** Briefly explain the activity or movement to the children before it begins, so they know what to expect and understand the purpose behind it.

Step 3: Implement active transitions in your daily schedule.

- **Active Songs and Rhymes:** Choose songs with corresponding movements, such as “Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes” or “If You’re Happy and You Know It.” These songs are engaging and help children burn off energy while learning body awareness.
- **Animal Movements:** Have children move like different animals. For example, “hop like a frog,” “waddle like a penguin,” or “slither like a snake.” These activities encourage large motor movement and creativity.
- **Follow the Leader:** Play a game of “Follow the Leader” where the teacher or a child leads the group through different movements such as jumping, stretching, marching, or skipping.
- **Freeze Dance:** Play music and encourage children to dance. When the music stops, they must freeze in place. This helps with both movement and self-regulation.
- **Obstacle Courses:** Set up simple obstacle courses that children can navigate as part of the transition. These can be moved around daily to keep them fresh and engaging.


Step 4: Evaluate and adjust based on observation.

- **Observe and Reflect:** After each transition, observe how children respond. Are they engaged? Are they excited or resistant? Take note of what works and what doesn't, then adjust accordingly.
- **Getting Feedback from Children:** Sometimes, asking children how they felt about the transition or what they would prefer can provide valuable insights for improving the process.
- **Consider Special Needs:** Some children may need more time, sensory breaks, or additional support during transitions. Be flexible and responsive to children's individual needs.
- **Provide Visual or Physical Cues:** For children who have difficulty with transitions, offer visual schedules, or provide a physical prompt (like holding a child's hand) to guide them to the next activity.
- **Gradual Transition:** For children who struggle with abrupt changes, implement a more gradual transition by providing calm activities (like reading a story or using soft music) before shifting to a new activity.

Physical Activity Log

A physical activity log in each classroom at a child care center is a helpful tool to keep track of how much exercise the children are getting. It helps teachers see how much and what kind of physical activity each child is doing during the day. This way, teachers can make sure all the children have enough time for exercise, moving their bodies, and practicing motor skills. The log can record activities like outdoor play, group games, dancing, and exercises. It helps staff check if the children are getting enough physical activity.

Here is an example physical activity log that you can use at your center.



Insert School Name Here

Physical Activity Log

Teacher Name: _____ Age of Children: _____ Date: _____

Classroom Activity & Description	Physical Activity Type (Circle one: Free or Guided Play)	Physical Activity Level (Circle one: Light, Moderate, Vigorous)	Location (Circle one: Indoors or Outdoors)	Time Physically Active
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Story Time • Read "We're Going on a Bear Hunt" by Michael Rosen while pretending that we were bears being hunted 	Free <u>Guided</u>	<u>Light</u> Moderate Vigorous	<u>Indoors</u> Outdoors	15 minutes
	Free Guided	Light Moderate Vigorous	Indoors Outdoors	
	Free Guided	Light Moderate Vigorous	Indoors Outdoors	
	Free Guided	Light Moderate Vigorous	Indoors Outdoors	
	Free Guided	Light Moderate Vigorous	Indoors Outdoors	
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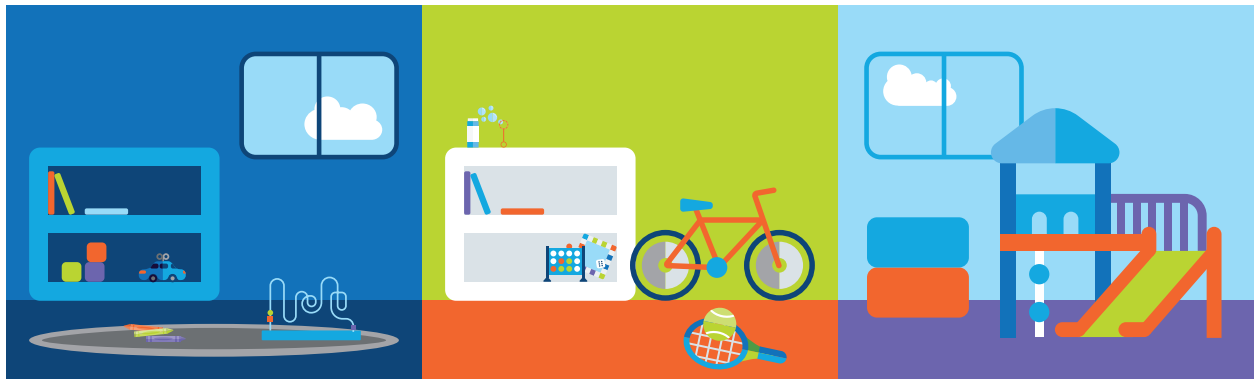
Game-Changing Projects

Game-Changing projects are tasks that take more time and planning. They need a lot of work, but they can make a big difference and create lasting changes. Here are projects you can do to improve your indoor play area.

Learning Centers

Learning centers are special areas in the classroom set up for different activities and filled with materials that help kids learn through play. Setting up your classroom with different “learning centers” has many benefits, such as:

- Reducing discipline problems because only a few kids are in each area, making it easier to manage the classroom.
- Creating a positive environment for both students and teachers.
- Keeping kids busy and engaged with activities where they can explore and try new things.



Step-by-Step Guide for Learning Centers

Step 1: Assess indoor space and determine designated play areas.

- **Evaluate Classroom Size:** Look at how big the room is and where there's space for the learning centers. The room should be big enough for several centers and should allow children to move around easily.
- **Create Flow and Accessibility:** Plan the room so that children can get to each center without feeling crowded. Make sure there are clear paths between the centers, and that every area is easy to reach, including for children with special needs.

Step 2: Identify various learning centers.

- **Dramatic Play Center:** This area helps children use their imagination, act out roles, and learn social skills through pretend play, like dress-up or playing store.
- **Art Center:** This area lets children be creative with drawing, painting, cutting, and making crafts, while also improving fine motor skills.
- **Reading/Library Center:** This area helps kids improve language skills by reading books, storytelling, and having a quiet place for reading.

- **Science Center:** This center encourages curiosity and problem-solving with puzzles, nature exploration, and sensory activities.
- **Math Center:** This center gives kids a chance to explore numbers, shapes, and counting through fun games and puzzles.
- **Construction Center:** This area helps kids with spatial skills and problem-solving by building with blocks, Legos, or other building toys.
- **Sensory Center:** This center focuses on exploring different textures, like sand, water, rice, or fabric, to help with sensory development.

Step 3: Implement indoor structured and free play sessions in your daily schedule.

- **Set a Routine:** Decide how long children will stay at each center. Some might need more time, and some might need less. For example, children might rotate between centers every 20-30 minutes.
- **Plan Center Rotation:** Organize the kids into small groups that rotate between the centers. This keeps the areas from getting too crowded and gives everyone a chance to try different activities.
- **Monitor Transitions:** Use a timer, bell, or song to signal when it's time to rotate between centers. Teach children to clean up one center before moving to the next.

Step 4: Evaluate and adjust based on observation.

- **Seek Feedback from Children:** Ask kids what they like about the centers and if there's anything they want to add or change. This helps them feel involved in their learning space.
- **Reflect on Effectiveness:** Think about if the centers are helping the children learn and grow. Are the kids interested and engaged? If not, make changes to improve the learning experience.



Section 5

Conclusion and Key Take-Aways

In conclusion, an indoor play space that encourages physical activity is very important. It helps children stay healthy, develop their motor skills, and feel good overall. The indoor play space also helps them get better at things like balance, strength, and working with others. By making physical activity a priority, child care centers help children build a strong foundation for staying healthy and active throughout their lives.

Key Take-Aways

- Indoor Play supports cognitive development through activities that stimulate creativity, while also enhancing fine and gross motor skills.
- The recommended amount of physical activity for children is 3 hours per day.
- To help toddlers and preschoolers reach the recommended amount of physical activity centers should target 15 minutes of physical activity per hour.
- Guided Play
 - Toddlers 1-2 years of age should have 30 minutes or more of guided play each day
 - Preschoolers 3-5 years of age should have 60 minutes or more of guided play each day
- Free Play
 - Toddlers 1-2 years of age should have 60 minutes or more of free play each day
 - Preschoolers 3-5 years of age should have 60 minutes or more of free play each day

Section 6

References

1. SHAPE America. 2020. *Active start: a statement of physical activity guidelines for children from birth to age 5*, 3rd ed. Reston, VA: Society of Health and Physical Educators.