



# MOTIVATE YOUR CHILD TO MOVE!

While external rewards like a prize or a special sweet treat can be effective for short-term gains, maximizing your child's internal motivation leads to a more consistent desire for physical activities.

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Does your child enjoy the playground and sports, or would he or she prefer to sit on the couch engrossed in TV shows or video games? Brain-based research shows that physical activity can increase attention span and memory, prepare the brain to learn new information, and improve behavior. If your child remains sedentary, what gets in the way? At the heart of any action is motivation. To kick-start your child's natural drive to get moving, mobility has to be pleasurable and meet his or her individual needs.

## FIND THE APPROPRIATE CHALLENGE LEVEL

By giving your child the power to control the level of challenge that is right for him, he will feel capable and fully engaged. For example, using pieces of paper crumbled by your child, a sibling can hold an empty wastepaper basket for shots while your child chooses how far or close. Over time, your child may venture to take higher risks, such as attempting farther shots, within this safe and supportive environment.

## USE POSITIVE LANGUAGE

The most powerful tool to shape how your child thinks, feels, and acts is your choice of words. The power of communication builds positive, trusting relationships which weigh heavily on motivation.

**Praising** their effort can encourage more effort: "It's wonderful that you are jumping rope"; "You dance so beautifully."

Give **nonjudgmental approval** to maintain effort: "You're trying lots of different ways"; "That's great that you keep going."

Make **honest, encouraging comments** about the physical activity itself: "Skipping is fun!"; "Climbing these stairs is hard work, and I can't wait to reach the top... it's going to feel great!"

Note your child's contributions with family members **that create a comfortable sense of belonging**: "Your brother is having so much fun playing tag with you!"; "It's so nice that you are pitching the ball for your sister."

**Support your child's belief in himself** and his abilities regardless of the results: "Running fast is hard to do, and you're doing it so well!"; "I am here to help you."

## FUN PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY!

To pique motivation, you can encourage teamwork, communication, and stronger relationships within your family using these fun activities! Be sure to consult your child's occupational therapist and/or physical therapist to modify according to individual needs. Your child can enjoy these as "brain breaks" after or "brain and body energizers" before concentrating on homework, during commercials of a TV show, or simply any time!

### GROOVE N' MOVE

Songs like Gloria Estefan's *Get on Your Feet!* and Van Halen's *Jump!* can rev your child up to get up from off the floor onto his feet or jump when the song indicates. Your child or siblings can change it up with other actions, like from a standing position "Get on Your Elbow" to the floor or "Kick!" rather than jump. This is great for children with limited language skills as they can watch and follow along.



### TWIST ON MUSICAL CHAIRS

Forming a circle of chairs with one less chair than the number of players, a leader stands in the middle and says, "All my family members who like panda bears/who have never gone camping/who are wearing jeans have to get up and find another seat quickly!"

### WHICH WAY TO GO?

With fun music in the background, family members take turns drawing a series of about six arrows in various directions. Then, he points to each arrow for the rest of the family to take a step in whichever way is displayed. This is great for children with limited language skills or who cannot read. If able, your child can make it trickier with verbal instructions to move backwards, the opposite direction, or in right-to-left sequence.

### PAPER PLATE BALANCE

With novel background music such as ragtime, each family member tries to balance a heavy-duty paper plate on their heads while walking around the house, telling each family member interesting things that happened today. If your son's plate falls, his conversational partner (perhaps his sibling or you) has to pick it up for him without causing their own plate to fall. Safe in this accepting environment, your child will discover that it's ok to take risks, feel silly, and make mistakes while sharing with others.

### LINE IT UP

Around the house, have your child crouch under the sofa, climb the stairs, and lift the couch cushions to scavenge for and find index cards with different colors of the rainbow, birthdates of family members, or states east-to-west for him to line up in order.

### IMAGINARY SPORTS

Sometimes the equipment, language, strategy, and/or contact of sport can be overwhelming for a child with special needs. With or without talking, one child can make believe she will swing a bat while her sibling is pretending to pitch the ball in this imaginary baseball. For solitary sport, your child can pretend to "swim" on the floor (moving arms and legs while on the back or the tummy).

### TREASURE HUNT

Hide trinkets such as stickers, decorative pencil erasers, or plastic jewelry in different places that your child must hop, jump, or skip towards while she expresses location words of where the treasure is hidden like "under the table" or "behind the plant".

### BALL CRAZE

Using lots of inexpensive, little items like pingpong balls, pick up sticks, or jacks spread throughout the backyard, one family member (or several on a team) have to gather and place these items into a bucket before being tagged by another family member who is throwing several foam balls at him or them.

### SWEATING YET?

Movement allows children to have more control over their abilities - and it's FUN! While external rewards like a prize or a special sweet treat can be effective for short-term gains, maximizing your child's internal motivation leads to a more consistent desire for physical activities. You play a crucial role to motivate your child by providing opportunities for success through positive communication and supportive relationships. •

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR:



Karen Kabaki-Sisto, M.S. CCC-SLP, has been a communication expert for over 20 years. As a certified Speech-Language Pathologist and Applied Behavior Analysis Instructor, Karen has been empowering people with autism & special needs to have more meaningful conversations like never before. Her highly

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