



Parenthood

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Moving to learn

Kiwi preschoolers are becoming more unfit. As well as affecting their health, it's affecting their learning



ONF

Teachers are noticing that more and more children are starting school without the basic skills they need for early learning because of their lack of activity.

"The children who can't hold a pencil, have difficulty sitting still and following instructions have poor co-ordination, balance and fine motor development," says Christchurch teacher and educator Gill Connell.

Gill says our busier and more sedentary lifestyles have contributed to the decline. "Preschool children aren't as physical as past generations. They are driven everywhere – even to the park – sections are smaller, there are no trees to climb in back yards and they are put in front of TV and computer screens for hours."

Research shows a strong correlation between how physically coordinated a child is and how well he or she achieves in the classroom. Modern parenting aids such as pushchairs, backpacks, jolly jumpers and walkers have affected the amount of time babies are spending on the floor crawling, exploring and preparing the brain for learning.

Parents are also spending less time with their children. "Children need to walk along

fences, jump over puddles, kick leaves, walk over cracks in the footpath. Parents need to take time to do those things instead of rushing them around to tennis or music lessons," says Gill.

"Just because they can play rugby doesn't mean they can function well in the classroom."

To combat the growing trend towards obesity and inactivity, Gill and Australian teacher Robyn Crowe have written a comprehensive manual, *Moving to Learn*, which gives parents, teachers and caregivers practical ideas on how to enhance activities that promote movement and its connection with music, learning and play.

"Play is what preschool is all about. Children learn through experience and the repetition of that experience," Gill says.

Covering from birth to age three, the manual and accompanying CD, which has been endorsed by Sport and Recreation New Zealand, includes age-appropriate activities, songs, chants and ideas to promote movement, language, pre-reading, creativity and self-esteem.

"It's the manual your baby didn't come with. It's not about feeding or solids but a holistic look at a child's development and ideas that can enhance it." Visit: www.movingtolearn.com

THINGS TO DO IN WINTER
(from *Moving to Learn*,
The Caxton Press, \$44.95)

From age 1

- Watch the rain, snow or hail through the window. Massage your child's legs, hands, feet or back imitating rain, sun and thunder. Talk about what you're doing so they become familiar with the appropriate words.

From age 2

- Collect pine cones together for the fire. Smell the rich scent of the pine needles.

- Sit on the verandah or deck and watch the rain. Comment on how heavy or light the rain drops are.

- Put on waterproof clothing and get an umbrella and go for a walk in the rain.

- Go to the beach on a mild winter's day. It can still be fun even if it's too cold to swim.

- Put gumboots on and walk through puddles. Float flowers, bark, leaves or boats made from empty matchboxes in puddles.

- Show your child how to draw on fogged windows.

- Collect hail in a container. Encourage your child to use a large plastic spoon or small container to scoop it up.

From age 3

- Play musical sounds that reflect the sounds of rain, hail and thunder. Use homemade instruments such as pots to imitate thunder and a shaker to imitate rain.

- Make simple decorations using pine cones. Paint them with a clear lacquer then sprinkle on glitter. Attach a ribbon at the top to hang it.

- Watch raindrops run down the windows, using the appropriate words to describe them.

- Feel ice on the grass or driveway and talk about how it feels.

