

ARTICLE REVIEWED

Moving together: Understanding parent perceptions related to physical activity and motor skill development in preschool children

Agard, B., Zeng, N., McClosky, M. L., Johnson, S. L., & Bellows, L. L. (2021). Moving together: Understanding parent perceptions related to physical activity and motor skill development in preschool children. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(17). <https://www.mdpi.com/1660-4601/18/17/9196>

THE PROBLEM:

Parents are socializing agents who can influence their children toward adopting healthy behaviors such as engaging in physical activities. Parents and other adults should encourage preschool aged children to be active and participate in activities of varying intensities such as playing tag, riding a tricycle, or climbing on playground equipment (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2018). However, parents can have misconceptions about how physical activity and motor skills emerge in children.



Research Summary:

The purpose of this study was to understand parents' perceptions about their child's physical activity and motor skill development. Thirty-one parents, mostly mothers, were interviewed and asked to describe their own childhood and current physical activities, their children's physical activity and motor skills, and the value parents place on physical activity and motor skills. Additionally, parents were also asked about their ability to teach their own children motor skills, their child's competence and preferences, and parenting practices.

Conclusion:

Parents shared about their own physical activity experiences and their current exercise habits. Parents viewed physical activity as beneficial for their children's health, self-concept, and behavior. Regarding motor skills, many parents did not see them as important and believed children would learn those skills as needed. Several parents felt they could teach their children motor skills, while others would seek help from a coach to help their child. Parents also described their children's motor skill competence as well as preferences for activities. Interestingly, some noted the lack of ball skills proficiency among girls, which has also been found by other researchers (Barnett et al., 2015; Wick et al., 2017). Lastly, parents described their parenting practices in the areas of responsiveness, demandingness, and structure.

Key Takeaway:

Parents bring their own histories, values, perceptions, and practices that shape how they interact with their children's physical activity and motor skill development. Children need to be encouraged to do a variety of physical activities. Additionally, children may not automatically learn motor skills, so it is essential for parents to provide opportunities to promote their development. The findings of this study can be used to inform future programs to help parents in promoting their children's physical activity and motor development.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Barnett, L. M., Ridgers, N. D., & Salmon, J. (2015). Associations between young children's perceived and actual ball skill competence and physical activity. *Journal of Science and Medicine in Sport*, 18(2), 167–171. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsams.2014.03.001>

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2018). *Physical activity guidelines for Americans* (2nd ed.). U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Wick, K., Leeger-Aschmann, C. S., Monn, N. D., Radtke, T., Ott, L. V., Rebholz, C. E., Cruz, S., Gerber, N., Schmutz, E. A., Puder, J. J., Munsch, S., Kakebeeke, T. H., Jenni, O. G., Granacher, U., & Kriemler, S. (2017). Interventions to promote fundamental movement skills in childcare and kindergarten: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Sports Medicine*, 47(October), 2045–2068. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40279-017-0723-1>