

Movement and Mental Health

The following article is written by Jessica Summers, Physical Therapy Assistant

What do you think of when you hear the word play? Do you think of recess, sports, being outside? It means something different for everyone. Well, play has a purpose; it helps with emotional regulation, builds social skills and helps with creativity. It is a vital essence of life. It teaches kids how to make sound judgements. It creates neural connections and continues to develop the ones they have as well as building neural pathways. The executive portion of the brain is enlarged as well as the hippocampus and memory center when children (and adults) play. The opposite of play isn't work, it is depression. Rough and tumble play decreases stress hormones and teaches social skills. What we have seen with an increase in screen time at younger ages is a decrease in children playing and having opportunities to judge danger (heights) but also an increase in anxiety and a decrease in processing. We are built and designed for 1 – eating, 2 – moving, and 3 – learning, in that order.

The most effective and highest producing schools promote physical fitness and play in all aspects of the educational setting. When active movement is incorporated in learning you see a decrease in behaviors and bullying, an increase in concentration in the classroom and an increase in overall production from students. When students are engaged they learn and it shows. Movement breaks are a great way to increase activity into daily school routine. Movement breaks don't need to be time consuming and they can be quick and easy. They can be as simple as doing cross crawls when learning or working on math facts or vocabulary. Having the class do power poses prior to quizzes or tests help to empower kids. When you add powerful phrases, it helps to reinforce confidence in self. Simple yoga poses help to relieve stress. When you add in brain gym after lunch or more active tasks it helps to calm and reorganize the brain.

Don't be afraid to ask your child's teacher if they can incorporate movement into their daily routine. And as adults we need to move too so incorporate exercise, yoga, or simple stretches it will help to relieve stress and anxiety in you too.

"Exercise is really for the brain, not the body. It affects the mood, vitality, alertness and feelings of wellbeing."

John Ratey MD

