

10 ways raising a physically literate child is like raising a reader

By: Richard Monette

In late August I picked up a local paper in a coffee shop. Looking at all the “back to school” inserts, my heart sank. “Summer is coming to an end,” I whispered as I scanned the advertising for binders, calculators, and sharpies.

On the last page a little card intended for parents caught my attention: “How to raise a reader”. After reading it I realized that I could easily replace the word “reader” with the words “physically literate child”.

So, to celebrate the collective sigh of relief from parents, also known as “back to school time”, here are 10 ways helping your child become a better reader and someone who loves to read are similar to helping them develop physical literacy and a love of being active:

1. Make reading/physical literacy a family value

Kids are born to play. They are born to run, jump, and skip. They learn by emulating what they see around them. Play as a family. Go out and enjoy learning new skills, activities, and games.

2. Let them read what they enjoy/do the physical activities they enjoy

Pleasure is the greatest incentive. Kids will do what they enjoy. They will also enjoy what they are good at. This means that they might repeat a game over and over. Support and reward all games, sport, or activity your kids enjoy. And make sure you play with them.

3. Be sure they are reading/playing at an appropriate level

Remember one simple rule as you support your child in activities and sports: every kid must do the right things at the right times under the right conditions. You don't expect your first-grader to read Shakespeare, so don't push them into doing physical activities that they are not ready to do. More importantly, don't enroll them in programs that might be beyond their age. Instead, keep play simple and age-appropriate.



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4. Don't use reading/physical activity as a punishment.

I cringe when I see a coach or a PE teacher use physical activities as a punishment (“10 push ups for being last.”). Reverse the trend. Promote play, games, and activities as a reward. As something special to be cherished.

5. Give books/equipment as a gift

Gifts are special. They spark excitement and kids' imaginations. Try to give your child toys that will encourage them to be active and promote the joy of playing.

6. Let your kids see you read/be active for fun

You have a powerful modeling effect on your child. If your child sees you enjoying being active, then they will see games, activities, and sport as a normal and worthwhile part of life.

7. Don't over-correct, don't over-practice

One way to make certain your kids will resent reading is by pushing them to read perfectly

too early. The same applies to their love of being active. Mistakes are a critical part of developing as a reader or becoming a physically literate child. Support, encourage, and guide your child.

8. Point out words/physical activity everywhere

Humans are born to move. We are physical beings. From the prima ballerinas to top athletes, we love to see great displays of physical aptitude. But don't forget the everyday display of skills. Encourage your child to recognize these skills everywhere. Point out everyday examples of physical ability: "Look at that firefighter climbing the ladder. What skills does she need to do that?"

9. Set aside time for kids to read/be active on their own

Free play is essential for kids. Be sure to encourage them to play by themselves without a tablet or computer.

10. Fun, fun, and more fun

Not every child will become an avid reader or a world-class athlete. However, both literacy and physical literacy are fundamental to the development of your kids. Most youngsters are born with the capacity to read and move well, but like any other skill, it must be learned and repeated on a regular basis so that it becomes second nature. Fun and enjoyment are the secret ingredients to learning new skills.



Active for Life is a non-profit organization committed to helping parents raise happy, healthy, physically literate kids. For more articles like this one, please visit activeforlife.com



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