

Physical Activity on a Dime!

Why are homemade materials just as good if not better?

- Homemade physical activity equipment is **easy on the budget**. With a young child's interests and needs changing quickly, making equipment at home with little to no cost makes it easier to keep equipment new and novel.
- **Creativity and imagination** become a big part of play. Because homemade equipment may not look exactly like what's available in stores, children don't have an automatic idea of how the equipment should be used. They can create their own games and uses!
- Families can make physical activity equipment from items they already have on-hand, making equipment **easily accessible**. This is great when friends and family come to play because more equipment can be made in an instant.
- Homemade equipment encourages both **indoor and outdoor play** so that children have opportunities to get active rain or shine.
- Just like purchased equipment, equipment that is homemade supports the development and practice of a **variety of gross motor skills**. The various textures, sizes and shapes of equipment also offer great opportunities for **sensory exploration**.

Homemade physical activity materials

Item	Instructions
Balance Beam	Use a 4x4 beam of about 8 feet in length. Secure two stabilizing pieces of lumber to the bottom of the beam with screws. Smooth the edges with a router or apply carpeting or matting over the length of the beam. (Contact a local hardware store for assistance).
Balance Boards	Use a ½" or ¾" piece of plywood for top of the balance board. Use a piece of piping or any other strong material that is shaped in a cylinder for bottom. Wrap the piping in tape if its surface needs to be smoother. Try making different shapes (circle, rectangle, square) for the top of the balance board.
Beanbags	Cut a heavy, sturdy cloth material into a 4" x 8" rectangle or a 6" x 6" rectangle. Fold the piece of cloth over to make a square (make sure you are folding the sides you want on the outside of the beanbag inwards). Triple stitch two of the sides. Turn the cloth inside out to expose a smooth outside surface. Fill with dried beans or other seeds. Sew the last side. If you want to get really creative, try making bean bags in different shapes!
Bowling Pins	Use either empty ½ gallon plastic bleach bottles or potato chip canisters. Fill each with 2 to 3 inches of sand to weigh them down.
Climbing Rope	Select a rope with a diameter of 1½ inches. Put a few knots in the bottom half of the rope so children can be successful at climbing. Space knots about 9 inches apart. By leaving the top half without knots, it can serve as a challenge to more experienced climbers.
Jump Ropes	Use 3/8" to ½" sash cord or plow line (this can be purchased at a hardware store). Cut into 5 to 8 foot lengths for individual short ropes. To prevent unraveling, wrap rope ends with duct tape and cut through tape with a sharp knife. If you would like longer ropes, cut pieces into 10 to 16 foot lengths.
Ladder	Rails of the ladder can be made from 2" x 2" or 2" x 4" pieces of lumber. The rails should be between 7' and 12' long. Rungs should be between 12" and 16" inches long with a piece of wood either 1½" in diameter or a 2" x 2". Use screws and/or nails to fasten rungs securely with spacing of 12" to 14" apart. Sand and paint or varnish the ladder for safety. Also, consider using varied spacing between the rungs for a more challenging experience.
Cones	Ask government traffic and highway agencies if you can have discarded traffic cones. Otherwise, half gallon bleach bottles or milk containers that have been emptied and cleaned can be used for cones by filling them with 2 or 3 cups of sand to keep them from tipping.
Movement Mats	Purchase clear plastic carpet runners. Cut footprints, handprints and seatprints from contact paper. Apply them to the carpet runner. This can help guide children in their movements.
Parachute	Instead of purchasing a parachute, use a sheet from a queen size or king size set. Military supply depots also may have old, inexpensive parachutes.
Scoop	Cut the bottom from a cleaned ½ gallon plastic bottle with a handle. Tape along the cut edge for safety!
Tires	Ask a tire store if you can have discarded automobile rubber tires. Look for tires of different sizes for children to have different handling and lifting experiences. You can paint the tires various colors and with designs using lacquer or water-based paints.
Vaulting Box	Stack old newspapers and magazines in a cardboard box. Tape and tie the box securely. Now you have a vaulting box!
Wands	Saw off discarded broomsticks or dowels in lengths of 30 inches or less. Sand and paint each colorfully!

From *See How They Run: A Lesson Guide to Preschool Movement Education* by Joni Coe and Lee Allsbrook. 1978.

More Simple Ideas

Fabric Squares = Dancing Scarves (just hem the edges!)

Yarn = Ball

Socks = Ball

Crumpled Wrapping or Newspaper = Ball

Laundry Basket on Side = Soccer Goal

Laundry Basket Upright = Basketball Goal

Paper Plates = Skates (great on various surfaces!)

Plastic Bottles = Throwing Target

A Combination of Items = Obstacle Course

An Open Space = Dance Floor

Bubble Wrap = A Fun Jumping Surface!

Resources

- *Healthy Moves from A to Z* by Child Care Aware of Kansas
- *Dr. Craft's Active Play!* by Dr. Diane Craft
- *Purposeful Play: Early Childhood Movement Activities on a Budget* by Renée McCall and Diane Craft
- *Physical Activities and Healthy Snacks for Young Children* by Team Nutrition Iowa

Sources:

Coe, J. & Allsbrook, L. (1978). *See How They Run: A Lesson Guide to Preschool Movement Education*.

Craft, D. & Smith, C. (2008). *Dr. Craft's Active Play! Fun Physical Activities for Young Children*.

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, Wisconsin Department of Health Services & Wisconsin Department of Children and Families. (2011). *Active Early: A Wisconsin Guide to Improving Childhood Physical Activity*.

Do It Yourself

Instructions:

Create a yarn ball to take home, so that the fun in physical activity can start right away! Yarn balls are soft enough that they can be great for play indoors and outdoors. The texture also makes it easy to catch and great for sensory exploration.

1. Create a template by cutting a rectangle out of cardboard. The rectangle can be larger or smaller, depending on the size yarn ball you want. Then cut a smaller rectangle out of the middle.
2. Begin to wind the yarn around the rectangle near the center of the shape across the longer sides of the template.
3. When yarn has been thickly wrapped around the rectangle in just the one direction, cut the string of yarn from the remaining spool.
4. Take a separate piece of yarn and fold it in half. Then, loop it through the sides of the internal hole of the rectangle and tightly tie it around all of the wound yarn, like a belt.
5. Once tightly tied, cut the yarn at the two edges of the rectangle.
6. Slide the yarn out from the middle of the rectangle. Tie a second string around the yarn ball, repeating step 4.
7. Trim and fluff the yarn ball into a round shape!

