



Irish Primary PE Association

Cumann Corpoideachais Bunscoile na hÉireann

Flexibility

Flexibility is another component of physical fitness (see IPPEA website home page Physical Activity and Fitness in Children during PE lessons). Flexibility is the ability of a joint to move through its full range of motion. It is related to how 'stretchy' the muscles, ligaments and tendons are which help to operate and stabilise the movement of a joint. Flexibility, like strength, is specific to a particular joint or set of joints. Flexibility helps to improve and maintain postural alignment which can assist in executing and facilitating movement. The more easily one can stretch, reach and bend the less likely one can injure muscles and joints.

What are the flexibility guidelines for Irish children?

Children should carry out activities which involve flexibility exercises 3 times a week. See <http://www.getirelandactive.ie/get-the-guidelines/children-and-young-adults/>

It is important to warm up before stretching. Warm muscles can be stretched further than cold muscles.

Safe stretching involves stretching slowly to a point of discomfort (not pain).

When stretching **do**:

- Perform flexibility activities for 2-3 minutes in every PE lesson.

Teach children stretches in PE lessons in warm ups and particularly in cool downs when muscles are warmer and more flexible

- Teach children how to stretch both statically AS WELL AS dynamically. **Static stretching** is used to stretch muscles while the body is at rest. **Dynamic stretching** is stretching while moving.

When stretching **do not**:

- Bounce or swing
- Lock out the knee or elbow joints
- Arch the lower back or neck

Activities that promote flexibility:

Descriptions and images of static stretches appropriate for children taken from Get Ireland Active website are to be found at the following web link:

<http://www.getirelandactive.ie/content/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/Stretching-for-children.pdf>

Descriptions and videos of dynamic stretches can be found at the following website

<http://www.childrenscolorado.org/wellness/info/teens/86275.aspx>

Examples include continuous lunges, knee lifts,

Quadriceps stretch (see web link sheet above): While walking two steps in between each stretch.

Knee Hug: While walking forward, hug your left knee into your chest, then step and repeat on the right leg, continuing with alternate legs. This is an excellent way to loosen up the gluts and hips

Gymnastic Inchworm: Make a push-up position on the ground, and walk your feet close to your hands while keeping the legs as straight as possible. Then return to the start position. Repeat over a short distance, making sure your hands and feet never leave the ground

Lunge: Step forward with your left leg into a lunge position (ankles, knees, hips and shoulders facing forward, torso upright). Take two steps to allow recovery and repeat on the other (right) leg.

Stretching to music in PE lessons

Gently perform stretching in the cool down with music in the background

Letter stretches

Children twist and stretch to form letters of the alphabet. The children and /or teacher may call out a letter; or a letter may be written and chosen from a set of cards; or letters may be placed on a dice and tossed. Letters can be performed standing up or lying down.



Children's School Desks Flexibility Break

Consider having flexibility breaks at children's schools desks during the school week

See Bizzy Breaks 'Stretchers': Irish heart Foundation <http://www.irishheart.ie/iopen24/bizzy-break-t-205.html>



Flexibility for children with Special Needs

Some children with disabilities may have limited range of movement. Children with cerebral palsy find stretching important because their muscles tend to contract. Children with spinal injuries may find stretching beneficial to prevent the permanent shortening of muscles. Most stretches can be performed by these children. Children in wheelchairs may require bands to be placed under their legs to assist in hamstring stretches (Hastie and Martin, 2006). It is recommended that teachers seek appropriate advice from parents, guardians and qualified personnel.

Reference:

Hastie, P. & Martin, E. (2006) Teaching Elementary Physical Education: Strategies for the Classroom Teacher. Pearson.