

MonkeyPlay. The Magic of Movement.

May 3, 2017. Center for Disease Control and Prevention

Percent of children aged 6-11 years who are obese: 18.4% (2015-2016)

Aug 21, 2017

Each year, the ***C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health*** asks a national sample of adults to identify health topics that are a "big problem" for children.

The Top 10 health concerns for children for this year were:

1. Bullying/cyberbullying (61%)
2. Not enough exercise (60%)
3. Unhealthy eating (57%)

Surrounding childhood obesity: inadequate exercise and unhealthy eating.

Rates of childhood obesity have tripled in the last 25 years, putting many children at risk for diabetes and heart disease, according to a report in *Academic Pediatrics*. Overweight and obese children are also likely to experience a lowered quality of life, an increased likelihood of contracting several serious disorders and a potential reduction in life expectancy. There are numerous approaches to treating childhood obesity along with the effects of sedentary behavior, but all boil down to a change in diet and lifestyle. Learning to eat well and incorporate physical activity into daily life needs to be made simpler.

Unstructured play opportunities, physical activity, and direct contact with nature bring a multitude of cognitive, social and health benefits to children. As these healthy behaviors have diminished there are direct correlations with drastic increases in the pervasiveness of obesity, attention deficit disorder, learning difficulties, sensory processing disorder, and impaired social skills. Most recently, weight related Type 2 Diabetes and atherosclerosis are now being diagnosed in children as young as 2.

MonkeyPlay was created to address the growing rates of sedentary behavior (SB) in children and to help prevent multiple chronic conditions that result from inactivity. As children now rely on technology for the majority of their play, grossly limiting challenges to their creativity and imaginations, as well as limiting necessary challenges to their bodies to achieve optimal sensory and motor development it is critical to devise programs to counter inactivity. If we reach children at an early age providing them with the opportunity to develop their confidence, ability and desire to be physically active along with comprehensive guidelines on healthy eating behaviors we can guide them into a life of well being. By involving the parents and caregivers of these young children with weekly take home activities we will also be able to influence healthy behaviors within the family.

MonkeyPlay addresses three out of four 5H vision elements: Eat better, move more, and connect with others in healthy ways. We are also incorporating *MonkeyPlay Read and Romp* as part of the weekly take home material to bring focus on early literacy development.

Year One: Pilot Program. We will launch the program at Chelsea Community Preschool.

Year Two: Expansion. We will expand the program into other 5 H communities and seek the interest of a variety of funders.

Year Three: Training and Implementation. We will begin the training of educators in the 5 H communities to implement the program into their local schools and preschools. We will continue to seek the interest of a variety of funders to expand the program into underserved communities outside of 5H. Agility materials and signage from Year One will be donated to North Creek Elementary and Chelsea Community Preschool.

What is MonkeyPlay?

MonkeyPlay involves fundamental locomotor skills, imaginative play and free association through the mimicry of animal behavior. Each session focuses on various components of movement vital to childhood development; like balance, cardiovascular conditioning, flexibility, strength, endurance, manipulative skills, non-manipulative skills, and various combinations of each. During the sessions we cover specific blocks of movement that feature unique animal attributes such as: the world's fastest, the worlds strongest, and those with the best balance. This focus allows children to develop a deeper appreciation for interesting animal behaviors affording greater freedom for creative play and mimicry. We introduce the "joy" of movement by inviting children to engage in social active game play with over 60 games from our movement manual, along with agility and balance practice on the rainbow jungle course that varies each week. Also included are take home activities for parents and children to extend movement based learning activities and nutritional education to the entire family.

Prior to its launch in 2016 MonkeyPlay spent over 1 year in research and development and has been reviewed with high regard by University of Michigan sports medical doctors, pediatricians, kinesiologists and senior dietitians. It is designed for children 2 – 6 years of age and addresses the pressing concern over inactivity and the multitude of developmental delays that stem from sedentary behavior along with the benefits of healthy eating.