



CLASSROOM PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IDEAS AND TIPS

There are many names for classroom physical activity — brain boosters, energizers, movement integration, active learning. Regardless of what it is called, the end goal is the same: to get students out of their seat and moving throughout the school day.

Classroom physical activity can be quick 1 to 5-minute bursts of movement that leave students more focused and ready to learn. Educators can plan physical activities in advance (e.g., have it scheduled into the day's class and/or integrated into the lesson to teach academic concepts) or use it as a classroom management tool (e.g., when they notice the class is getting restless and needs a boost in energy).

In the times of COVID-19, it is more important than ever to support children in their mental, social, emotional, and physical health. Students may feel stressed, fatigued, unmotivated, and socially isolated due to the COVID-19 safety precautions at school or virtual learning at home. And, students are at risk of being increasingly sedentary during these times. Classroom physical activity is an important approach to safely and effectively mitigate some of these challenges.

This resource provides simple and easy physical activity ideas that require very little preparation and no equipment. These activities can be done with students standing next to their desks and many are adaptable to different ages, abilities, and settings. Modify activities to better suit your unique class.

Print and cut activity cards for easy access and share them with students to do at home as well. Each activity card is labeled with an icon to indicate the suggested age group, learning setting, and type of physical activity. Although the activities are labeled, we hope they spark some inspiration for other activities and encourage educators to be creative and adapt activities for different grade levels and learning settings.

General Tips

- 1 Model healthy behavior by participating in physical activity with students.**
If students are at home, encourage parents/caregivers, siblings, guardians, and other household members to join in, when possible.
- 2 Communicate with parents and caregivers** about the importance of physical activity. Share the types of activities being integrated to keep students active so they know what to expect, understand the purpose, and can support and reinforce participation. Share any practical considerations of which families should be aware (e.g., space needs, audio requirements, noise level, etc.).
- 3 Ask students to share their physical activity ideas** and give them the opportunity to choose the physical activity idea and/or to lead the activities.
- 4 Mix it up** — all the ideas are flexible and can be customized. Change the prompts, rotate the movements/exercises, and vary the length of the activity. Make it work for you and your students.
- 5 Play music.** Play a song or tune to signify a movement break. Music and movement can help students feel more energized and less stressed.
- 6 Be mindful of different abilities and provide alternatives** (e.g., arm circles instead of jumping jacks; doing activities from a seated position instead of a standing position). Let students know that it is okay to engage in a different physical activity — the idea is to take a break and move.
- 7 When doing virtual learning, keep in mind where students are physically located** (e.g., in a community center, at home in a crowded space, etc.) and how that might affect their ability to participate in physical activity.
- 8 Notice patterns of student participation** (i.e., who is participating and who is not) with respect to race, gender, language of origin, physical or learning ability, where they are seated, etc. Explore reasons why they may not be engaged and find opportunities to more inclusively engage these students. For example, some students may not know seemingly common terms for movement or games (e.g., jumping jacks, etc.) and therefore might not participate or feel included. To help students feel more comfortable, teachers can model the physical activity and do a practice round with the class. Modeling physical activity is also a best practice.
- 9 Use classroom physical activity as an opportunity to build community** and get to know one another.



Engage youth in sharing/creating a physical activity

Encourage and give students an option to: 1) create a 1 to 2-minute video of themselves doing, or explaining, an activity of their choice, or 2) write a description of a physical activity idea. These physical activity ideas can be collected and used as a bank for the class to choose activities from.

List of movements for physical activity breaks

- Side shuffle
- Vertical jumps
- Jump side-to-side
- Run in place
- Squat jump
- High knees
- Jumping jacks
- Skip
- Front & back strokes
- Forward & backwards arm circles
- Standing opposite elbow-to-knee

List of common stretches

- Hold head to right shoulder, and then head to left shoulder
- Shoulder shrugs/rolls in each direction
- Reach for toes, reach left arm to right foot, reach right arm to left foot, bend over and hold elbows (can sway hips)
- Arms up and wiggle fingers, wiggle toes
- Rotate both wrists in each direction



HELPFUL TIP:

Engage your school's physical education teacher to model the correct form and how to safely do a list of stretches and physical activities, either in-person or virtually, early and/or throughout the school year.

Links to more classroom physical activity ideas

[Active Home from OPEN](#)

Great games, videos, and a PE at Home Calendar.

[#PlayAtHome from Playworks](#)

A manual full of great games adapted for the home, in English and Spanish, and Live Recess 5x a week at 11, 1, and 3 pm CST.

[Fitness Breaks from Healthier Generation](#)

Short videos to get the heart rate up and the fun going.

[HYPE at Home from Hip Hop Public Health](#)

Fun music videos that can be filtered by grade level, type of media, and PE standards.

[Good Energy at Home from GoNoodle](#)

Great videos and off-screen activities.

ICON LEGEND

AGE RANGES



All ages



Elementary school



Middle school



High school

CLASSROOM SETTINGS



In-person activity



Virtual activity

ACTIVITY TYPE



Physical activity break



Physical activity integrated into lessons

Scavenger Hunt

Give students a list of items to retrieve from their home and a time limit to retrieve them so they move as quickly as possible (e.g., 15 items in 5 minutes). Ideas might include something red, something you wear on your head, something that brings you joy, etc. After time is up, go down the list and ask students show what they found on screen.

TIP: You can tie in a few items for the next part of your lesson (e.g., math — something that measures volume; geography — an object that tells a story about a place; literature — a book by a favorite author).

This activity can also be done in-person if it is conducted outdoors.

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5-minute Dance Party

Create a playlist and get students to do a different movement every time you change songs.

TIP: Use digital content designed to promote classroom physical activity, such as [Hip Hop Public Health](#) and [GoNoodle](#). Let students choose the songs, a video, and the movements.



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Crazy 8's

Choose four different exercises and ask students to do each eight times.

Examples of exercises:

- 8 jumping jacks
- 8 silly shakes (just shake as silly as you can)
- 8 high knees
- 8 punches
- 8 lunges

TIP: Include both upper and lower body movements.

Getting to Know You

Ask students to stand up. One by one, each student introduces themselves with their name and favorite physical activity, acting out the activity. The class says hello to the student in response, and also acts out the physical activity.

VARIATION: Ask students to stand up and do some kind of movement if something applies to them (e.g., Stand up and do arm circles if your birthday is in the month of December).



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Stretch Session

Ask students to either stand up by their chair/desk or sit up straight in their chair and lead a short stretch break. Hold each stretch for about 30 seconds.

Examples of stretches:

- Hold head to right shoulder, and then head to left shoulder
- Shoulder shrugs/rolls in each direction
- Reach for toes, reach left arm to right foot, reach right arm to left foot, bend over and hold elbows (can sway hips)
- Arms up and wiggle fingers, wiggle toes
- Rotate both wrists in each direction

TIP: Play calming music in the background while students stretch.

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Touch Blue

Ask students to touch something with a certain attribute (e.g., "touch blue" - and students touch something blue in their setting). Other ideas: "touch something cold," or "touch something that makes you happy." Students can move around their space and off screen, but they should be able to hear the next instruction. Wait 10 seconds between instructions so the game moves quickly. If a participant cannot find an item during any of the rounds, provide them with an alternative physical activity (e.g., march in place, stretch, high knees, etc.).

TIP: Tie in concepts from lessons being taught (e.g., science – touch something recyclable). Then, have students debrief what they touched.

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Walking Challenge

Organize and facilitate a class walking challenge for a prize and/or as a fundraiser for a cause. Track steps or miles or minutes.

TIP: If tracking steps/miles, students can download an app on their phone to use as a pedometer. For students who don't have access to a phone or pedometer, reach out to your local or state health department to ask about programs that offer free pedometers.



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20-20-20 Rule

Use the 20-20-20 rule where every 20 minutes, you look at something 20 feet away for at least 20 seconds to minimize eye strain.

TIP: A variation might be to prompt students to scan the room or walk around and look for an object (e.g., something that starts with the letter "p") and then have a few students share what they saw/found.

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4 Walls

Choose 4 different movements. Facing one wall of a room, prompt students to do a movement for 30 seconds. Then, ask them to face another wall and prompt another movement. Repeat until all 4 walls are covered.

Movement examples:

- Side shuffle
- Vertical jumps
- Arm circles (forward/backwards)
- Jump side-to-side
- Run in place
- Squat jump

TIP: For one of the walls, let students choose their own movement or prompt them “act out your favorite activity.”

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Stand Up — Hand Up — Pair Up

1. Verbally provide or write a prompt or question on the board.
2. Ask students to put their hand up in the air and find a partner by waving to another student.
3. Students are given an identifier for which partner will answer first (i.e., the oldest partner starts).
4. Together, partners answer the prompt together.
5. At the end, partners thank each other and wave again.
6. Students find a new partner by putting their hand back in the air and finding someone new to wave to.

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Up, Down, Stop, Go (Opposites)

- “Up” — Students squat down
- “Down” — Students jump, or stretch up as high as possible
- “Stop” — Students do a specific movement in the same spot (e.g., running, hopping, etc. in place)
- “Go” — Players freeze

Call out the commands “up,” “down,” “stop,” or “go” one at a time. Practice a few rounds before starting to model the activities as you call them out.

TIPS: Ask a student to be the caller of the commands.

Add other commands (e.g., “fast” – players move slowly; “forward” – players face backward).

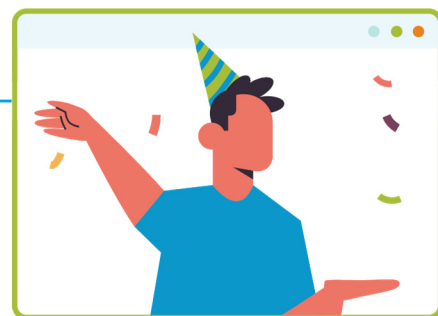
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Freeze Dance Party

Play music, and when the music stops, students freeze.

TIP: Mark off personal space using floor tape or cones, so students have properly distanced boundaries.



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Rock, Paper, Scissors, Jump

Ask students multiple choice questions and have students respond by jumping into the correct position:

- Choice A — feet together
- Choice B — feet apart in a straddle position
- Choice C — one foot in front of the other

Students jump three times and on the fourth jump they should land in the position that corresponds to the correct answer choice.



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Charades Relay

Review the basics of charades! One person acts out a word or phrase without speaking while the team tries to guess the word is.

Teams compete trying to be the first to guess all items on a prepared list of words. To start, ask one member from each team to come to you. Show the first word on the list and have them return to their group to act it out. Once a member of the group guesses the word correctly, another team member returns to you for the next word. They must tell you the first word before receiving the second word. The game is over once a team completes the list.

TIPS: To add more movement, have each player complete an exercise before receiving the next word (e.g., 5 jumping jacks).

If virtual, use the chat function to share the list and have teams guess as many words as possible within a short time span.



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Vote with Your Feet

Post around the classroom signs that say: yes, no, true, false, agree, and disagree.

Depending on the day's lesson, ask students to answer questions by going to stand by the sign that best reflects their answer. If applicable, ask students to elaborate on their answers. Remind students to stand at least 6 feet apart.

TIPS: If there is space in the classroom, ask students to actively move (e.g., hop, skip, etc.) to their answer choice.

If virtual, instead of signs around the classroom, use movement to indicate the response. For example, do arm circles if you think A; stretch overhead if you think B; give yourself a big hug if you think C).

Zip, Zap, Zop

This game challenges groups to stay focused and consistent in rhythm. Have students stand in a circle and repeat: "Zip, Zap, Zop." The first person starts the game by saying "Zip" while clapping their hands together and sliding one hand towards another student. The next person says "Zap," repeating the motion towards a different student. The third person says "Zop," repeating the motion towards another student. Repeat. Encourage eye contact throughout the game.

TIP: To add more movement, add "Boing" to the end of the "Zip, Zap, Zop" sequence. When someone says "Boing", everyone jumps up. Then, the person who says "Boing" restarts the sequence with "Zip".

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