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PHYSICAL LITERACY IN CHILDREN'S EARLY YEARS

Vassiliki Riga

Introduction

Physical literacy (PL) in children's early years serves as a crucial foundation for their overall development and well-being, as it pertains to the relationship they build with movement and physical activity throughout their lives (Sport England, 2023). Rooted in a holistic view, the development of the 'whole child' (Pesce *et al.*, 2014) through movement extends beyond simple energy expenditure and therefore, embraces a broader perspective throughout life. The earlier the relationship with movement is nurtured, the more it contributes to positive health outcomes, such as healthy weight, motor skill development, cognitive development, psychosocial health, self-esteem, bone and skeletal health, healthy blood pressure, and cardiometabolic health (Timmons *et al.*, 2012; Carson *et al.*, 2017; Zeng *et al.*, 2017; WHO, 2019; Virgilio and Clements, 2020).

This chapter delves into the comprehensive journey of PL, which commences with one's birth and progress throughout early childhood and beyond. There are many key actors who share the responsibility of accompanying children on this journey, beginning with families and caregivers, extending to schools and the broader community, and policymakers and policy developers. However, successful collaboration among these key actors requires a shared vision, which promotes a meaningful engagement to support and integrate PL into children's lives, and ultimately into the lives of all citizens.

This chapter introduces family, school, community and policy-based strategies, and approaches, alongside behaviours, attitudes, conditions, and trends for promoting PL during the early years. This period is considered critical as it provides an opportunity to shape children's lifelong habits and behaviours related to physical activity, establishing a robust foundation for a lifetime of active and healthy living (Carson *et al.*, 2016; WHO, 2019; Jones *et al.*, 2020). Moreover, during this period, family lifestyle habits are often open to changes and adjustments. In a broader context, the community demonstrates a sensitivity towards the well-being and development of a family's newest member. It is important to emphasise that the effectiveness of these strategies relies upon considering the social and cultural factors unique to each group and society, given that these factors shape and influence behaviours, values, beliefs, customs, practices, and individual and collective identities.