

# Introducing fundamental movement skills

---

The following information has been adapted from Get Skilled Get Active (NSW Department of Education and Training, 2000).

This article will offer information and advice on:

- fundamental movement skills in your PDHPE and sport programs
- how students learn and develop fundamental movement skills.

## What are fundamental movement skills?

Fundamental movement skills are the building blocks for movement. They are the skills which children need to participate successfully in all types of games, physical activities and sports. Examples of these skills can be frequently seen in popular games and activities played by children in the school playground.

Fundamental movement skills are sometimes categorised under three headings:

- locomotor skills, such as the run, jump, hop, skip, gallop, leap and dodge
- non-locomotor skills, such as the static balance, bend, sway, twist and turn
- object control skills, such as the catch, throw and kick.

Twelve fundamental movement skills are presented in this resource. These twelve skills represent a solid foundation for the development of specialised skills, enabling students to participate in a wide range of physical activities. They are:

1. static balance
2. sprint run
3. vertical jump
4. catch
5. hop
6. side gallop
7. skip
8. overarm throw
9. leap
10. kick
11. two-hand strike
12. dodge.

# Why teach fundamental movement skills?

The development of fundamental movement skills is an important step towards ensuring lifelong involvement in physical activity. Without proficiency in skills like throwing, catching, kicking, leaping and balancing, students are less likely to explore the range of options available to them to establish and maintain active lifestyles.

The development of movement skills occurs sequentially, with proficiency in fundamental movement skills forming the basis for the development of more advanced sport-specific skills.

Research shows that children who are competent in fundamental movement skills are more likely to enjoy sports and activities and to develop a lifelong commitment to physical activity. Research also suggests that children who do not master fundamental movement skills are more likely to drop out of physical activity in later life.

Students who have achieved proficiency in fundamental movement skills have been found to have better self-esteem, socialisation skills and a more positive attitude towards physical activity.

Research indicates that the improvement in self esteem and confidence in performing fundamental movement skills has a flow-on effect to other areas of a child's education. For example, improvement in confidence in physical coordination has been found to help develop proficiency in reading and writing.

# How do children develop fundamental movement skills?

Contrary to popular belief, children do not pick up fundamental movement skills naturally as part of their normal growth and development. Children need to be explicitly taught these skills and given opportunities to practise them. Children also need to be provided with:

- developmentally appropriate activities and equipment
- visual demonstrations of skills
- instruction and feedback
- a variety of activities, with a focus on fun and challenge
- encouragement
- a safe and positive learning environment.

It is reasonable to assume that, given instruction, encouragement and the opportunity to practise, boys and girls can be equally proficient in all twelve fundamental movement skills by the end of primary schooling. Skills which do show gender differences in levels of proficiency are almost entirely due to environmental factors. These factors include increased opportunities to participate and greater exposure to activities that use the underlying fundamental movement skills.

# How long does it take to learn fundamental movement skills?

It is easy to underestimate the amount of time it takes to develop proficiency in fundamental movement skills. The amount of time it takes to become proficient in a skill is influenced by:

- the complexity of the skill
- the age of the learner
- the instructional methods used.

Research in Victorian schools found that it takes between 240 and 600 minutes of instruction time for the average student to become proficient in one fundamental movement skill (Fundamental Motor Skills, Department of Education, Victoria, 1996).

It is recommended that only four skills should be focused on in any one school year to allow for quality instruction.

## When should fundamental movement skills be taught?

The optimal period for introducing fundamental movement skills is in the early years of schooling. There are several reasons for this.

- Early Stage 1 and Stage 1 are a time of relatively slow growth.
- Children have plenty of opportunities to practise in structured and unstructured activities during these early years.
- Current movement patterns are not entrenched.

As students continue to develop physically, cognitively and emotionally, opportunities to refine and develop skill proficiency will occur as they move through the stages of primary school.