



## PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND SPORTS THE MEANS TO INCLUSION

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### ABSTRACT

Today's life coupled with competitions and neglect is destroying our precious children. Children's are overstressed to do so many works that their little brains could take. Working parents with little time for the kids are worsening the situation. Little observations at home and overcrowded classrooms often neglect a child. Corrective measures are not taken when they are required and many a children turns out to be academic failures, they face peer rejection and finds no one to turn on. No teachers at school no parents at home. The children with learning disability are on rise. Physical activities in the form of fun games serve to these children as a hope of reunification with their peers. These activities instill self esteem and physical fitness. From the last fifteen years there have been number of research to find out the effects of exercise on the cognitive function. Many of these studies have revealed of various positive effects of exercise on brain. Exercise could also serve as a boon to these effected children in many different ways. It's high time to regard sports, games and exercise as serious activities.

**Keywords:** Learning Disability, Physical Activity, Self Esteem, Physical Fitness and Cognitive Function.

### INTRODUCTION

Learning disability is a severe weakness in ability to learn a specific skill such as reading, writing, listening, speaking, reasoning and

doing math. It should be noted that learning disability is not a deficit in general intellectual ability. Intelligence test conducted on children with learning disability found that many children have average to above average intelligence. Children with learning disability differ in their problems. Some may have problem with writing and other may have problem with reasoning or speaking. These disabilities are common and the child must be taught the way to overcome this. Many children with learning disability have performed extremely well in their later life.

#### Symptoms of Learning Disability in children

There is no one sign that shows that a child is having learning disability. Some of the problems of child with learning disability are

- While reading aloud repeats and pause often.
- Have difficulty in learning alphabets, words, spelling and sounds of letters.
- Difficulty in understanding what he is reading.
- Difficulty in building vocabulary.
- Awkward way of holding pencil and very messy handwriting.
- Difficulty in understanding jokes and comedies.
- Difficulties in following directions.
- Face difficulty in expressing through words and writing
- May not retell the story in the same sequence.

If a task is given the child becomes confused as to where to begin and how to continue.



Child with some of these problems shows fear or avoidance of academic work, low self esteem, moodiness and behaviour problems.

#### Causes of learning disabilities

Till date the exact cause of learning disability is unknown. Some of the possibilities are -

**Heredity** - Often learning disability is found in the family. It is common to find that children with learning disability having other adults in the family with same difficulty.

**Difficulties during Pregnancy and birth** - learning disability is seen to be associated with alcohol, smoking or drug use during pregnancy, injury or illness during or before birth, low birth weight, lack of oxygen, and premature or delayed labor.

**Incidents after birth** - Head injuries, nutritional deprivation, exposure to toxic substances (i.e lead) can contribute to learning disability

#### Physical activity and sports the means to inclusion

Physical activities could be very useful for a child with learning disability. It strengthens them to remain with their peers and avoids isolation. Sports and games that improve balance and coordination such as gymnastics, aerobics, martial arts, basketball etc can benefit kids who struggle with learning disability. But with enough interest from child, and the right coach almost all physical activity will be fruitful. It helps in the following ways -

#### Reunifying experience

Physical activities could serve as a reunifying experience for the child who is feeling lonely because of the failure in academics. These children though fail academically may find success in the field of sports. The playing field offers them a chance to equal or best their peers, strengthening self esteem which could make a big difference in the class room.

**Developing team work and social skills** - Sports and games by its nature is enjoyable and child friendly. It serves as an excellent media to promote the teaching of team work and social skills. Children with learning disability should be send to a coach who is considerate and is able to give special attention to these kids.

**Learning academic skills** - Skills such as problem solving, sequencing, and focus in a new way, helps them with their academic work. Sports reinforce kids' ability to pick up new concepts. Children with behaviour problems can profit from the release of pent up emotions through exercise and help to control their behaviour in the class.

**Sports reduce stress** -It reduces stress and the child already having problems is saved from the stress syndromes. It helps these children to redirect their energy positively.

**Developing physical fitness** -Physical activities also helps the child to be physically fit as children with learning disabilities are often find to be sedentary with very less body movements. This leads to obesity and other hypo kinetic diseases. Physical activity turns to be the remedial measure as far as this problem is concerned in these children.

Before initiating children with LD to sports they should be given adequate activities to develop their gross motor skills.

#### Activities for developing gross motor skills in children with LD

Gross motor skill is a critical life skill. It is helpful for major body movements such as walking, maintaining balance, coordination, jumping and reaching. Gross motor skills involve the large muscles of the body that enable such functions as walking, kicking, sitting upright, lifting and throwing a ball. A child's gross motor skill depends on both muscle tone and strength. Development of these skills



in a child with LD is necessary as this sets the foundation for complex movements and higher level of coordination in real sports.

Apart from this, gross motor ability shows connection with other physical functions such as a student's ability to maintain upper body support, will affect his ability to write. Writing is a fine motor skill. Students with poor upper body support may have difficulties with activities such as writing, sitting up in an alert position, sitting erect to watch classroom activity and writing on a black board.

Physical activities for developing gross motor skills by improving large muscles in the legs, arms, trunk to run, jump, throw, catch and kick are as follows-

- a. dancing
- b. Walking
- c. Swimming
- d. balancing
- e. Playing pretend
- f. Riding tricycles, scooter
- g. Pulling and pushing
- h. Throwing, catching, rolling
- i. minor games
- j. swinging, gliding and climbing

These activities are natural to child and must be encouraged to do enough to get the desired effects on the development of gross motor ability. Once gross motor ability of a child is developed he can be initiated into sports. Always choose the sport or game based on the child interest and abilities. Look also for the right kind of coach who can motivate the child and help him to continue in the sport. Drop outs are the major problem with these children. These children should be encouraged to continue the activity so as to reap the benefits and to use it for their daily activities off the field.

Studies are going to find out the positive effects of exercise on children with learning disabilities and if exercise could serve as a major remedial factor for these children. A remarkable review appeared in the journal *Neuroscience and Biobehavioral Reviews* by Dr Kirsten Hotting and Brigitte Roeder of the University of Hamburg, Germany with the title "Beneficial effects of physical exercise on neuroplasticity and cognition" which says that

- Aerobics exercises improve behavioural performance on activity, learning and memory and the effects lasts for months and years. Exercises promote the formation of new nerve cells, blood vessels and connection (synapses) between neurons
- Two important growth promoting molecules are triggered to higher levels. These are called brain - derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF) and insulin like growth factor 1 (IGF1), both of which promote the production of neurons and neurotransmitters. But it is not clear whether these are temporary increases, though that the increased levels might last a few months.
- Exercise appears to reduce the risk of chronic diseases such as type 2 diabetes, stroke and hypertension.

## CONCLUSION

While planning out Individualized educational program (IEP) for these children, physical education may also be included to get an overall development of these kids. Latest research is indicating that it's high time to take sports, games and exercise seriously for all the kids and kids with LD in particular. Importance of play and recreation is reflected through article 31 of the UN convention on the rights of the Child, signed way back in 1989, and ratified in 1992, which recognizes 'the right of the child



to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.' Attention must be given to the school PE curriculum to meet the standards of all sorts of children.

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