

ACTIVATE AMERICA: Stretch Before Play



This theme's ACTIVATE AMERICA activity is fairly simple. Stretching is something often done in P.E. classes as well as organized sports, but not so often in Y-Care. Yet we engage in vigorous physical activity almost every day. Promote another healthy habit in the children in your program by stretching with them before you play a group game at least three times over the next two weeks.

Time: 15 minutes

Equipment: none required, mats are optional

What to do:

1. This activity is meant to be done before starting an active group game, so make sure you know what you're playing following your stretching session. A good place to stretch is in the middle of the gym. If you have a smaller group, everyone can sit/stand in the center circle.
2. Ideally, this will be a whole-group activity. Try to get everyone involved, even if they aren't going to play in the group game that follows. You could also take attendance (sign children in) during this time, that is, if you're going to start when the children have first arrived in the afternoon.
3. Either choose a leader, be the leader yourself, or better yet, take turns. Go around the circle and let each child introduce a stretch. When everyone has had a chance to lead, your stretching session will be complete.
4. Before you start, ask children to notice the tension in their bodies. It really is possible to tell a big difference after stretching so end with the same task. Talk to

them about why they might have tension, and why their muscles could be tight (i.e. sitting in desks all day, taking tests). They will have some interesting feedback for you, I'm sure!

5. Now begin. Do a variety of stretches for both sitting and standing positions, and try to stretch as many limbs/areas of the body as possible (i.e. hands, feet, legs, arms, neck, back, stomach). Many yoga positions would be appropriate. Give the children ideas when they get stuck.
6. You can also do calisthenics (i.e. push-ups, sit-ups, lunges, leg raises).
7. At the end of the session repeat the task from earlier of having children notice the tension in their bodies. Ask them if they feel more "stretchy"? Can they tell a difference? Did they enjoy stretching? Did it feel good? Did any of the stretches hurt? You can think of more questions.

Now that you're all stretched out, enjoy your group game!