



Active Learning

A practical guide for teachers to help children move and learn.



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This practical guide will support you to develop an active, healthy learning environment, ensuring children get every opportunity to move and learn every day.

Are you a primary teacher or head teacher who is keen to get their children more active throughout the school day? Perhaps you're not aware of the benefits you'll see in your class or school? Or maybe you're not entirely sure how to incorporate more activity into the day?

Many teachers we've worked with feel that they lack the skills, the confidence, and above all, the time to figure out how to get their children more active throughout the day without losing valuable learning time. In this guide, we'll help you understand the immense benefits of increasing physical activity in school, and how you can easily roll out an exciting new plan for your classes and lessons with some easy example that you can start using today.

What are the benefits of getting children more active?

Evidence shows us that regular movement is the magic formula for whole school improvement, as regular, fun, and engaging daily activity can have a HUGELY positive impact on learning and academic achievement, social and emotional wellness, as well as all the well-known physical health benefits.

Did you know that just 30 minutes of activity every day can have a major impact on a child's life and whole school improvement?

In 2017, a meta study of 10,000 children across 11 countries showed that the best results are gained when combining high quality PE with Active Learning throughout the day. It showed that attainment could be boosted by an additional year! That focus and behaviour improved by an additional 15 minutes per class, and that children were happier and healthier, overall. (Ref: Alvarez-Bueno, Celia; Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha et al, Pediatrics, 2017)

Another study over two years investigated the effects of physically active lessons on academic achievement of children. After the study, children experienced greater learning gains in mathematics and spelling — equating to four months! (Ref: Mullender-Wijnsma MJ, Hartman E, de Greeff JW, et al. Pediatrics, 2016)



That's like a child spending an extra year at primary school and is essentially seven years for the price of six! Who doesn't want that?

So, would you like to provide your children with the opportunity to perform to a higher level, academically? How about a classroom where the children are even more focused and better behaved for longer? And, what about creating a learning environment where children love coming to your lessons, and feel healthier and happier whilst they're at school?

Imagine that your entire school uses and benefits from Active Learning tools, and envisage the improvements that it's bringing to not only your individual children, but to the wider culture of learning, and your reputation as an innovative, results driven school?

Knowledge really is power, and so here's another little nugget of wisdom we want to share with you. Part of the mindset change process is to understand how effort level affects the brain and body... Imagine a scale of 1 – 10 illustrating light to vigorous activity and effort level.



Effort level 1 – 3

Improves focus, attention, and mood as well as increasing blood flow to the brain which will reduce brain fog and improve concentration.

Effort level 4 plus

- Improves focus, attention, mood, and brain fog
- Stimulates Brain Derived Neurotropic Factor (BDNF)
- Burns more calories from fat
- Improves cardio fitness
- Improves strength and muscular endurance

Light activity ideas (1 – 3)

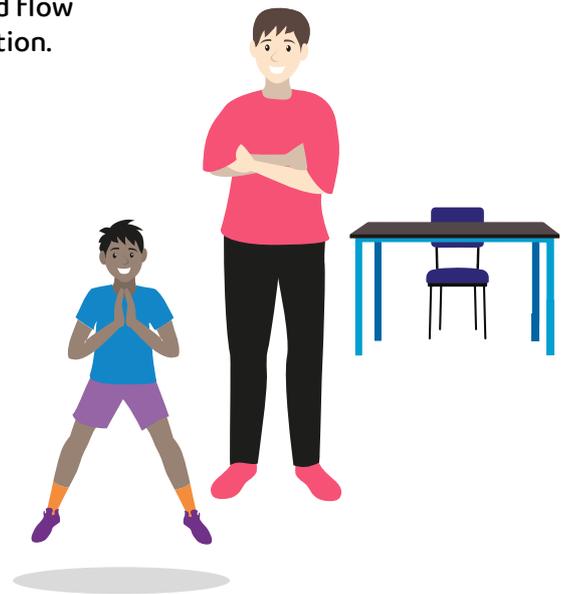
- Slow movement (such as walking) around the room
- Standing when problem solving
- Stretching, bending, and twisting

Moderate activity ideas (4 – 7)

- Brisk movements around the room with intermittent bending and stretching
- Repeated bending and stretching, like standing up and sitting down
- Classroom dance or fitness activities behind their chairs

Vigorous activity ideas (8 - 10)

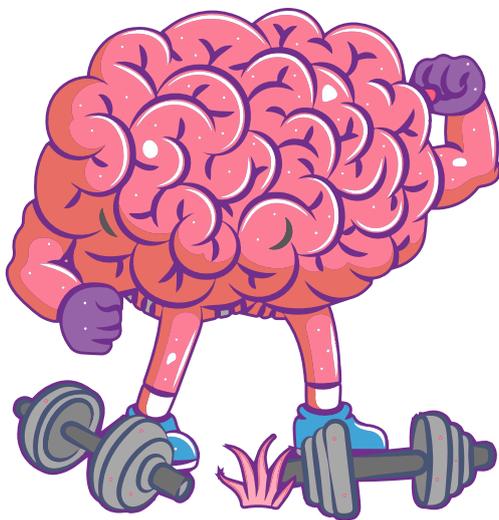
- High impact, on-the-spot activities like jumping, high knee switches and star jumps
- Circuit training
- Total body blast using the chair and space around the chairs



Every session doesn't need to be all out sweaty – in fact, there are numerous benefits to all levels of activity.

Two lighter types of activities include Pilates and Yoga, which (and among many others) offer a wide range of benefits, as well as requiring a more focused, relaxed, and thoughtful mindset.

Anything that gets children away from sitting for long periods is a good thing, and below we've detailed even more ideas to help get your head around what's possible in your own classroom.

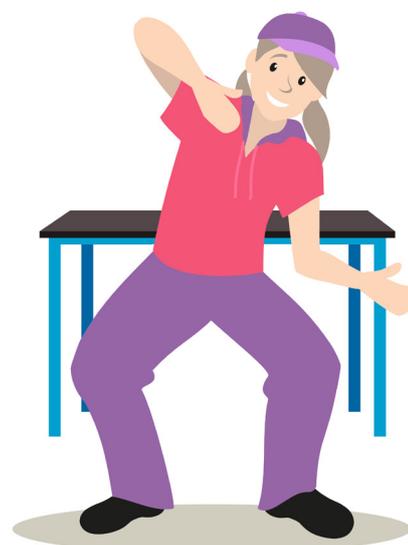


If you're wondering what **BDNF** (Brain Derived Neurotropic Factor) is, it's a protein released into the brain during exercise that causes braincells to sprout the structural branches required for learning. BDNF has been likened to fertiliser for the brain.

Learn more about this from a brilliant book called *Spark: The Revolutionary New Science of Exercise and the Brain* by Ratey, John J. (2013).

Children **love** learning actively as it's fun and it breaks up their 'traditional' classroom lessons. Plus, it helps their brains absorb more information and improves their mood, focus and behaviour. Win, win and win!

So, there are numerous benefits to all parties for getting children more active and normalising a culture of regular and fun physical activity in the classroom!

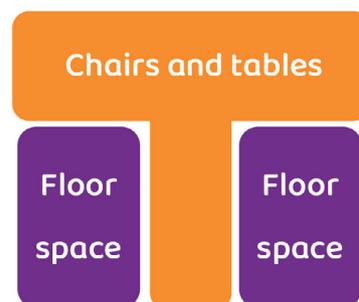


Now let's take a dive into building activity into your classroom...

3 Areas of Active Learning



Start by de-cluttering your classroom space and creating room to be more active around the tables and chairs. Below are some examples of how teachers are arranging their classrooms to create active learning spaces.



Active Blasts

These are a great way to get short quick bursts of activity into the school day. Active Blasts are an easy way to get children active and you'll see increased focus from the children after just one session. Use a short movie on your interactive whiteboard to get 2 -10 minutes of moderate to vigorous activity behind their chairs to introduce the idea of being active in the classroom.

Lead the activity yourself or try some of the video-based resources that are available with a **free imoves account** - these are super easy to facilitate without fuss, prep, or cost.



Active Learning

Once your active blasts have been introduced effectively, you can introduce active learning as part of your ongoing lessons. Gradually build up the amount of active learning you do in the classroom over your first 4-6 weeks, as this will help to build up your confidence and allow children time to adapt to new teaching methods.



Here are some teaching concepts for you to try:



Choose Between

This is where the children answer a question using a movement, for example – jumping up if the answer is true or crouching down if the answer is false.



Word Action Games

These work well in literacy, especially to dramatize stories or poems.

The example slides on the right show a simple way to get children moving and spelling numbers.

The image shows two example slides for 'Word Action Games'. The top slide is for the number '1'. It features the number '1' in blue, the word 'one' in purple with red underlines, and a list of actions: 'Stand up tall', 'Arms in the air', 'Balance on tip toes', and 'Stretch your body!'. The bottom slide is for the number '2'. It features the number '2' in blue, the word 'two' in purple with red underlines, and a list of actions: 'With a partner use 2 body parts to join up!', 'Elbow', 'Knee', 'Forehead', 'Hands', and 'Foot'. Both slides include the 'imoves' logo and the text 'Word action games'.



Top and Tail

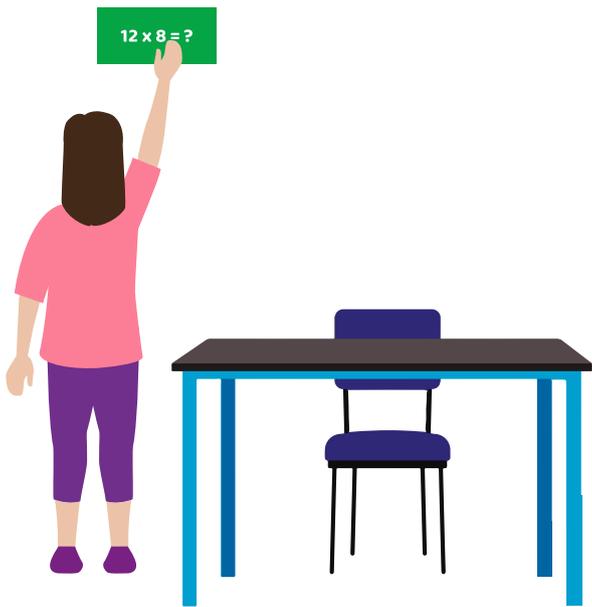
This is when a learning outcome always begins and ends with a short dance or set of moves.

This can be done effectively with timetables and fractions, for example, children do a short two to three-minute dance to warm up their brains and body, ready to solve maths problems. Then the same dance is repeated at the end as a celebration of learning.

So simple, yet so effective. Movie based plug-and-play activities work incredibly well by enabling children to follow along.

Circuits

Use a set of 10 or 12 cards, placed around the classroom, where each one has a problem to be solved in Literacy, Maths or Science. Children in small groups spend a short time at each circuit card before they must move on. One, two or three minutes per station work well, depending on the types of problem they are solving. This works brilliantly where children have to punctuate sentences correctly on each card, and then do an action relating to the sentence they have just punctuated.



Apostrophe circuit card 1

1. Punctuate this sentence on your worksheet...
-The postmens bags are full of letters-

2. Do at least 10 power squats.

Squat low enough to look through a letterbox!



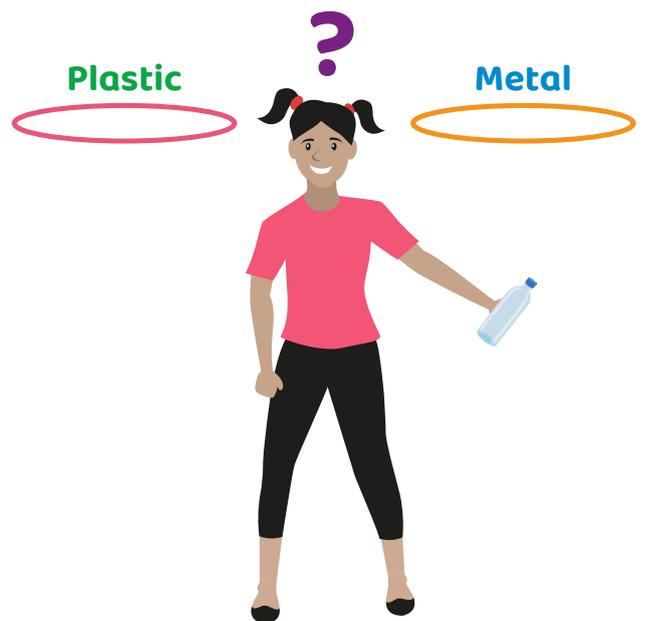
Data Collection Circuit

Another easy concept, using simple data flash cards. Stick a selection of your data cards all over the classroom using various heights and harder to reach (but still safe!) places, for example, the underside of tables or on top of shelves. They should not be hidden, but they should be placed so that the children must do lots of bending, stretching, crawling to see them. Children move around collecting data and solving maths or literacy problems as they go.

Team games

They can work in classrooms, however the more space the better for this teaching style. If you were asked to create an active game for your year group around a learning outcome you were preparing to teach next lesson or term, the chances are, you'd be able to come up with something amazing.

In one of our recent Active School workshops, a teacher came up with a brilliant idea for a science learning outcome around everyday materials. The concept was a relay race with children in teams of five. One team member collected one object per round from the centre of the room, and decided if it was made of plastic, glass, metal, or wood, then deposit said object in the correct hoop.



Hot Tip: You could start adding movement into sedentary lessons with one of the easiest concepts — and in our opinion, it's Choose Between (as detailed above).

Children love learning actively as it's fun, it helps their brains to absorb more information, AND it improves mood, focus and behaviour. Get them moving as regular as possible and **NORMALISE ACTIVITY** in the classroom in just two weeks!

When you have ignited the "Active Community" in your school, it's time to convince others of your success and gather evidence of how children are responding to the changes. For example, are children more focused on tasks after activity? Are they happier and in a brighter mood? Are they better behaved in class? You bet they will be!

This kind of evidence based in YOUR school, impacting on YOUR children, will resonate so much more to YOUR teaching staff as you will have overcome most of their barriers, changed their perception (mindset) from "this is too difficult" to "I can do this too" – **ultimately making it easier for them to take the next steps.**

Line activities

The next layer to consider is to introduce corridor and active line activity. We ask our children to stand in lines and wait quietly, but why not use this time to cram in an energising, refocusing activity like this.

Sing to the melody of The Grand Old Duke of York:

Oh we're marching in a line - (March on the spot)

Yes we're waiting to move - (March on the spot knees higher)

We can touch our toes - (Touch your toes)

We can touch the sky - (Stand on tiptoes with arms up high)

We can do a funky groove! - (Do a funky groovy move!)



By this point you may be thinking that we've completely lost the plot OR that you think this approach could really work for you. If it's the latter, read on, as there's lots more 'bonkers' stuff where that came from!

This idea, which we believe is being used in an academy chain in Birmingham (UK), is one that we love. This Head Teacher is responsible for encouraging pupils to run, jump and side step down the corridors. Each corridor in school has its own type of activity children should try to perform when moving down them. And guess what, he's created a happy, healthy environment where children learn and want to be part of.

Another teacher in Sheffield (UK), started their active school journey with NO CHAIRS Tuesday! He reported that his pupils were in shock for the first 20 minutes, then had a wonderful day working without their chairs.

Please take inspiration from this "out of the box" thinking, even if the activities described may not work in your school or classroom, you'll be able to adapt them and tweak as you want and help introduce new initiatives that excite and motivate the children to learn actively.



A Final Thought...How to Get Over a Bad Behaviour Hump.

When anything new is introduced, you know there is always a danger of children being over-excited and hyperactive. It's exactly the same for this kind of lesson so just be aware that you need to manage this in the first few sessions.

I always like to think about 3 things:

Step 1 - Don't panic!

Step 2 – Set their expectations so the class know when they will be more active during the day. Explain how they will feel during the activity for example slightly warmer, maybe sweaty, but remember that's normal and a GOOD thing!

Step 3 - Set your expectations around how you would like them to behave during and after around the classroom. After the activity they should grab a drink and sit down quietly, ready for the next stage of learning. Remind them that if they cannot behave, in line with the principles of active learning, they will not be able to participate in all the fun activities you have planned for them! For example, they should be mindful of tables, chairs and other children moving.

Our advice... power through and make active learning the norm not the exception.

Let me know if this report was useful, or if there are any other activities of your own that you would like me to share with my network of like-minded teachers – it's always great to inspire each other!

You can find me at imogen@imoves.com.

Best wishes,

Imogen

PS. Don't forget to set up your free imoves account for tonnes of free resources to support you and your children. Go to [imoves.com](https://www.imoves.com)

