

Spectrum SKILLZ

Physical Development for Children on the Spectrum

As defined by the American Psychiatric Association, "Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a complex developmental condition that involves persistent challenges in social interaction, speech and nonverbal communication, and restricted/repetitive behaviors." And while this is at the core of ASD, what tends to get overlooked are the significant difficulties that some with ASD face in relation to movement and motor planning.

In the early years, children with ASD are typically behind in their gross motor development by about 6 months in comparison to their non-ASD peers. As the children get older, physical challenges are more apparent when it comes to fitness and sports. They typically have poor muscular strength, coordination, balance, and endurance. Because of this, a lot of parents are hesitant to enroll their child in a physical program. And, although it can be challenging for the child at first, the benefits far outweigh the problems that come along with a sedentary, isolated lifestyle.

The key to success of improved motor skills is to find a program that is specifically designed for children with ASD, with this goal in mind. Since most programs only focus on the social difficulties associated with ASD, it is very hard to find resources that address the physical problems as well. And while there are programs and sports that work to include these children, it can be overwhelming to them because they often have sensory issues and problems associated with processing complex rules.

In order to provide another resource for children with ASD, the Spectrum SKILLZ program was developed to give them a specially designed class to focus on better attention span, preliminary skills, and social skills. The added physical benefit comes from using elements of traditional Martial Arts curriculums to build skills that are appropriate for these children.

In addition, the instructors are also trained to understand the needs of children with jASD so that they can better communicate with and reach them. The instructors also break down the rules in an easy to follow format and physically demonstrate this to the class. This helps the students process the rules and see exactly what is expected.

One of the many drills in this program is called "Laser Jumps." In this drill the instructor uses a foam noodle to move across the ground at varying speeds. The students are asked to jump over the noodle using both feet at one time, to bring their knees up, and to keep jumping even when they get tired. This drill helps to build their stamina and strength in their legs.

As you can see the Spectrum SKILLZ program is an innovative method for working with children with ASD. Not only does it address the typical problems associated with ASD such as lack of social, communication, and processing skills but it also addresses the lack of fundamental motor skills. This means that children will learn and grow at a pace that is fun and meets their needs while being challenging enough to help foster development.