

Physical Therapy Games for Kids

Children can have short attention spans, so working with them as a physical therapist can be challenging. Some children do not want to continually repeat the same motions or exercises, so it is important to figure a way to make the physical therapy session fun, while still achieving your goals. One way to do this is by turning the physical therapy exercises into games.

Video Games

A variety of video games require movement and spatial awareness to move the characters on the screen. Therapy can have a reputation of not being fun, but by incorporating games, especially video games that children often see as play, into the therapy session, you will make the session more entertaining for the child and meet your goals more easily. Some clinics create their own games, while others use commercial video games. Popular video games feature sports such as golf, baseball, bowling and boxing. These games give the children the challenge of beating the game or the competitor while incorporating real motion. Video games can be more beneficial than playing the actual game, especially in a rehab facility, because it eliminates the weight of holding the golf club, baseball bat or bowling ball and focuses on the motion used to perform the sport.

Ball Games

Balls are a versatile modality in the physical therapy clinic. Smaller balls, like golf or tennis balls, can be used to massage muscles on the body, while larger balls like kickballs, basketballs or soccer balls can be used to develop hand-eye coordination or strength in the arms and legs. You can toss the ball back and forth to help develop the child's reflexes or play kickball to develop speed, strength and coordination.

Follow the Leader or Simon Says

Children tend to be visual or auditory learners, or some combination of the two.

Depending on the child, you may choose a game like Follow the Leader or Simon Says

to incorporate movement and therapy in a fun way. Follow the Leader is geared more toward visual learners or children who participate more with you on an equal level. Simon Says is better for children who are auditory learners or who work better by seeing you as a figure of authority. Either exercise will allow you to tell or show the child what you want them to do, then allow him to perform the movement on his own.

Obstacle Course

Children tend to become bored with repetition, so it is important to keep the therapy session varied. One way to incorporate multiple exercises or use the same muscle groups in different ways is to set up an obstacle course. Different courses can be set up for children with varying physical difficulties. For example, if you have a patient who needs to build her leg strength, you may choose to set up a course that includes frog hops, sitting on a scooter and pulling herself with her legs, hopping or running for a set distance and performing lateral lunges through cones. If you have a patient who is working on balance or coordination, you may set up a course that includes a balance beam, throwing or catching a ball, riding a tricycle for a set distance or through cones and crawling through a tunnel