The developmental benefits of physically active play for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD): Implications for use in clinical pediatric rehabilitation settings

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What is Play? Active Play?

- Play is the developmentally appropriate and beneficial occupation of childhood[1].
- Theories of play suggest it can have short- and long-term effects across multiple domains of child development[2].
- Active play is a key contributor to the physical activity levels of young children, while also promoting social competence, problem-solving, and resiliency[3].
- Active play tends to decline as children grow older and shifts to reflect more structured rule-governed opportunities[4].

ASD, Play and Active Play

- Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental disability characterized by challenges with social skills, communication, and the presence of restricted interests and behaviours[5].
- The play behaviours of children with ASD are often highly repetitive and self-stimulating[6].
- Challenges with social, communication, and motor skills contribute to challenges engaging in active play[7].
- Children with ASD engage in less active play than their peers, which limits the extent to which they can reap the benefits of active play[8].

Active Play in Clinical Practice

- Relatively low-cost intervention for clinical organizations
- Promotes contextually-relevant skill transfer for children
- Play as a form of communication
- Short and long-term developmental benefits
- Promotes opportunities for inclusion among peers

Conclusions

1. Active play is a relatively low-cost option for promoting developmental milestones for children with ASD.
2. Provides contextually relevant opportunities for skill transfer.
3. Future practitioners may benefit from the adoption of active play as a form of pediatric rehabilitation.

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