

# INTRODUCING THE JOYS OF SPORTS AND FITNESS

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JUST AS IMPORTANT, AS YOUR CHILDREN MASTER THE "GAME," THEY BUILD CONFIDENCE.

Sports and fitness, a.k.a. an active lifestyle, are good for the body and soul. I can confidently say that this message is proven, receiving more attention and emphasis by the day.

So how do we safely and effectively introduce our youngest children to a physically active life? And once we expose, how do we hook them forever?

## Two key components to success

The first is making the introduction (and continued involvement) fun. The second is the all-important concept of confidence.

From the earliest toddler years, literally and figuratively start the ball rolling. The belly-aching laughter from a game of Nerf or rubber push-ball as you and your little one sit on the floor, legs spread, touching to form the boundaries, rolling the ball back and forth, is priceless.

Here's a classic: Everyone down on hands and knees, ready to chase. One of you gives the ball a shove down the floor or hall and it's a race to recapture. These types of creative games foster physical, mental and hand-eye coordination along with muscle development in an atmosphere of pure fun.

Just as important, as your children master the "game," they build confidence. You should therefore build slowly to ensure development at a pace commensurate with ability. If you move too quickly, the child tends to become frustrated and wants to quit. If you move too slowly, the child becomes bored.

Your rolling and crawling games may progress to hitting a rolling Nerf ball with a Nerf bat or even off a tee. And then there is my family's favorite pillow-throw game. A parent (or both) strategically throws small pillows side to side with the object of having your child make a diving catch on to a mattress, bed or soft carpet. Feel free to speed up the throws when ready, intensifying the challenge while promoting footwork, focus, coordination and fun. Everyone in the family can participate and work up sweat that earns that trip to the kitchen for some light ice cream!

Here are a couple of additional progressive games to consider:

## 1. Basketball

- Roll the little rubber ball to your child, child picks it up, runs and dumps it in the bucket.
- Toss the ball to your child on a bounce or fly and have him/her turn and toss on a fly into the bucket.
- Introduce a Little Tyke hoop.

## 2. Tennis

Start with the Nerf paddle. Simply swat the Nerf ball around, making contact while the ball is moving. Progress to tossing the ball on a bounce or fly and having your child strive for contact. Then you can move to lightly hitting the ball back and forth so that it lands within boxes formed by tape on your basement or hallway floor.

The bottom line is be creative with these games and have fun.

Visit [nnpnparents.org](http://nnpnparents.org) for more valuable tips and discussion on maintaining a healthy lifestyle for your kids as well as suggestions for fun, active games.



Photo courtesy Barb Lazarus.