Considering Our Responses

The opportunities and experiences offered to infants and toddlers throughout the day to develop and practice their physical development and skills varies. How you approach physical play and learning is directly related to your thoughts, values, and beliefs about physical activity and development, as well as knowledge level of infant and toddler development and comfort level with experiences. Review the following scenarios and consider how you might respond to best support and encourage the infant or toddler’s ongoing growth and development.

Lucas, 22-months of age, climbed the stairs to wash his hands. He turns on the faucet and holds one hand under the running water. He then gets a squirt of soap and washes the same hand while holding onto the counter. As he holds onto the counter and rinses one hand, he balances on his right leg while holding his left leg out to the side.

What might this feel like for you as you observe? What might Lucas be learning about his body? About movement? How might you respond if you were nearby and watching?

You may feel anxious inside and concerned about his safety. A first reaction might be to go over and ask Lucas to place both feet on the steps. You may also be thinking about Lucas and what you know about his physical development. Lucas may have great balance and a good sense of where his body is in space. Knowing this can help you to pause longer and feel more relaxed and comfortable with the idea of his “risk taking” which supports an experience and opportunity to help Lucas feel more physically competent.
Caroline, 8-months, enjoys exploring the environment and using her body to manipulate and learn about objects. She was able to move her body to move unwanted objects out of the way as she began to explore three puzzle pieces with her hands and mouth.

What might this feel like for you as you observe? What might Caroline be learning about her body? About her motor skills? How might you respond if you were nearby and watching?

You may feel concerned about Caroline as she explores the puzzle pieces using her mouth. You may be wondering about the safety of the puzzle pieces and the need to ensure the pieces are cleaned immediately. By using her mouth to explore, Caroline was able to feel the attributes of each. She was also able to solve problems as she moved unwanted objects out of the way to reach the desired puzzle pieces. It’s likely that as Caroline gets older, she will begin to use other senses and ways to explore objects, such as using her hands to feel the edges of the puzzle pieces and her eye to see colors and patterns. It’s also likely that Caroline’s problem solving skills and use of her body to support problem solving will continue to develop as the knowledge gained will support new skills to solve further problems as she encounters them. If young children are to become confident problem solvers they must be encouraged to start from birth in the exploration of their environments – tangible, hands-on experiences with caring adults to discover what things are and how things work.