



Mind-Body Kids

More than Just Monkeying Around

By the Merrithew Health and Fitness™ Team

On top of regular daytime classes and extra-curricular activities, kids are experiencing increased levels of stress as a result of academic and social pressures, increased competition in multiple areas of their lives and of course constant exposure to electronic media. Slowing down to engage in mindful movement proves itself to be just as beneficial to youth as it is to adults, and it's also a growing fitness segment to consider adding to your portfolio.

'Mom and Tot' style classes aren't anything new to the scene and during high school, youth are likely to join an extra-curricular team, but what about those pivotal years in between? Expanding from offering basic child minding services for exercise-seeking parents, gyms and fitness facilities are capitalizing on the growth potential for kid-focused fitness. Ranging from mindful practices such as kids' yoga and pilates to extra-curricular sports and activities, the

business of keeping kids active has the potential to become a fitness industry mainstay. In addition to kid-specific programming, pint-sized fitness gear and even high-end active wear are filling in this gap and directly targeting this burgeoning market.

Benefits of Kids Fitness

Adding physical exercise and mindful movement to kids' daily regimen has the potential for many positive effects that will benefit their physical, mental and emotional health.

Children who engage in regular physical activity can experience the advantages of:

- Better concentration at school
- Improved quality of sleep
- Enhanced confidence
- Strong sense of self-discipline

Additionally, despite living in a culture of convenience, participating in physical activity presents an opportunity to disengage from TVs, laptops and other electronics and enjoy meaningful social interactions—especially important during these formative years. As their minds and their bodies grow, effective and responsible exercise will nourish them both, keeping kids active, and instilling healthy, active habits for life.

Mindful Movement Exercises for Youth

Gentle stretching and strengthening movements will challenge mobility, agility and flexibility while establishing healthy habits early. Here are three mindful moves suitable for kids from STOTT PILATES® Fitness Fun: Pilates for Kids DVD, by Merrithew Health & Fitness™. To do these moves, you'll need a kids' exercise mat, Flex-Band® Exerciser (light resistance) and a 12" Mini Stability Ball.

Roll Up with Mini Stability Ball™

- **STARTING POSITION:** Supine, pelvis and spine neutral. Legs extended along mat, adducted or abducted hip-width apart, in parallel. Ankles dorsiflexed. Hold ball, arms reaching overhead. Scapulae stabilized.
- **INHALE.** Stabilize scapulae as arms reach toward ceiling.
- **EXHALE.** Initiate with a head nod, simultaneously stabilize the scapulae and sequentially flex spine off mat, one vertebra at a time (passing through imprint), until pelvis is vertical, spine flexed, arms reaching parallel to floor, top of head toward fingers.
- **INHALE.** Maintain spinal flexion and roll ASIS away from front of femurs.
- **EXHALE.** Continue to roll spine through flexion, one vertebra at a time onto mat (passing through imprint). Allow pelvis to return to neutral once lower thoracic reaches mat. Once head is on mat, stabilize torso in neutral and maintain scapular stability as arms return overhead. Complete 3-5 repetitions.

Partner Spinal Stretch

- **STARTING POSITION:** Sit facing your partner with legs outstretched and feet touching. Knees can be bent, holding onto partner's hands.
- **INHALE.** Expand the ribcage.
- **EXHALE.** Lean back, gently pulling your partner forward, rolling their spine through flexion.
- **INHALE.** Hold for a breath and expand the ribcage.
- **EXHALE.** Return to sitting upright. Repeat with opposite person. Complete 3-5 repetitions each.

Mountain Climbers

- **STARTING POSITION:** Get into the plank position with hands under shoulders and feet hip or shoulder width apart. Option to place the feet on top of two workout disks.
- **INHALE.** Prepare in plank.
- **EXHALE.** While keeping your core muscles engaged, bring one knee in towards your chest, sliding the disc across the floor. Hold for a brief second with spine neutral.
- **INHALE.** Switch the legs.
- **EXHALE.** Return to start position. Complete 10-25, alternating legs in a slow and controlled motion to emphasize the core muscles.

Tips for Kid-Focused Programming

- **Limit participation in group fitness to six kids or less.** This size allows the instructor to keep a keen and focused eye on class participants while giving kids the opportunity to engage in a social environment.
- **Use age-appropriate tools.** Put safety first, utilizing relatively lightweight resistance tools such as one-, two-, or three-pound Mini Handweights, Soft Dumbbells and Toning Balls.
- **Make it fun!** Turn fitness into a game with fun accessories like a Weighted Exercise Hoop or Kids' Foam Discs.
- **Give kids their own, unique fitness gear.** Fitness will be a more fun endeavour when kids get to use their own specialized equipment. Let kids express their personality through kid-specific exercise mats and mat bags.
- **Be mindful of kids' capability at varying ages.** Some younger children will be able to progress to more challenging exercises while some older ones may be better suited to lower levels that are easier to attain.
- **Cue correctly for children.** Doing slightly different variations of traditional exercises or using cute names and images really helps engage them and helps them be more invested in the routine.

The topic of kids and physical activity has always been an important one. In the fitness industry where professionals share the common goal of enhancing the lives of others through physical activity and healthy living, it only comes as a natural extension to extend this purpose to the children's category, providing the same healthy benefits to kids that adults are already reaping.



Merrithew Health & Fitness™ (MH&F) is a leader in mindful movement with high-end programming including STOTT PILATES®, ZEN+GA™, CORE™ Athletic Conditioning & Performance Training™, Total Barre™ and Halo® Training. Backed by 25 years of experience and the latest findings in exercise science, MH&F's philosophy is to deliver safe, responsible and effective exercise for people of all ages and levels of fitness.

