

# Benefits of Juggling

*Juggling is a fun and safe activity that develops eye-hand coordination, fitness, balance, ambidexterity, rhythm, and reflexes. For these reasons, many schools include juggling in their physical education program. Juggling also has many benefits that reach beyond the physical education realm...*

## Boosts self-esteem and self-confidence

Self-esteem and self-confidence can dramatically increase through the successful completion of movement goals. In juggling, each new accomplishment provides the participant with immediate internal reinforcement. Also, recognition for achievements from peers and teachers provides external reinforcement. This leads to positive decision-making and positive risk-taking.

## A model for step by step learning

Learning to juggle is a series of challenges. The process of learning new juggling skills teaches students how to set goals and attain them through a progression of steps. Students can apply this model to learning in other contexts.

## Enhances learning skills

In order to learn juggling skills, participants need to accept challenges, pay attention, listen analytically, observe critically, plan a learning strategy, go step by step, focus on task, and learn from mistakes. This process develops patience, persistence, and self-discipline.

## Reinforces the open-ended nature of learning

As with academic subjects, juggling provides endless opportunities for exploration and growth. If you can toss and catch scarves, you can learn new patterns or try other objects. Besides toss juggling, there are many other forms of juggling to explore.

## Appeals to different intelligences

Juggling provides a "right brain break in a left brain day" and stimulates the learning process in many ways. Those with strong spatial intelligence love to visualize juggling patterns. The rhythmic nature of juggling appeals to those with musical intelligence. Moving around, throwing, and catching develop kinesthetic intelligence. And it is certainly noteworthy that logical and mathematical thinkers dominate the ranks of jugglers; this may be due to the experimental nature of the art, where practitioners explore patterns and relationships.

## Improves skills used in reading, writing, math, and science

Juggling develops tracking, crossing the mid line, and fine motor skills that help improve *reading* and *handwriting*. (*Teaching Elementary Physical Education* featured an in depth article about this.) Learning to juggle also improves sequencing skills used in *math* and *science*. Research in these areas reinforces the work of Maria Montessori and Jean Piaget who theorized that motor movements and tactile sensation increase cognitive learning.

# Juggling in the Classroom?!

*In addition to the benefits already mentioned, teachers may be interested in the benefits of an ongoing classroom based juggling program...*

## **A great break in routine**

During extensive academic work periods, physically active study breaks help students learn better. In a growing number of classrooms throughout the country, students have access to feathers, scarves, or beanbags so they can take "juggling breaks" when the teacher allows. Then they can return to work refreshed and more productive.

## **Therapy for certain learning disabilities**

It has long been thought that juggling has therapeutic value for children with disabilities such as dyslexia, attention deficit disorders, and hyperactivity. Many parents of children with these disabilities have reported improved behavior as a result of learning to juggle. There is substantial evidence to support these claims. Juggling supports the recommendations made by Russell Barkeley, PhD in his book Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder:

"Increasing the novelty and interest level of tasks through the use of increased stimulation (e.g. color, shape, texture) seems to reduce anxiety level, enhance attention, and improve overall performance... High interest or active tasks may help hyperactive children to channel their disruptive behaviors into constructive responses... Interspersing classroom lecture or academic periods with brief moments of physical exercise may also be helpful, so as to diminish the fatigue and monotony of extensive academic work periods."

## **Improves student behavior**

Many schools with juggling programs report improved student behavior, perhaps because students who enjoy juggling the most are sometimes those with whom teachers have difficulty. Thus, the privilege of "juggling breaks" becomes an incentive for these students to behave.

## **Improves interpersonal skills**

Schools with ongoing juggling programs find that a lot of peer teaching takes place as participants encourage one another to succeed at their own pace. They learn through experience that the key to success is practice, and they appreciate the achievements of others as a result. Also, juggling with one or more partners requires cooperative problem solving, and helps participants learn to work with others.

*The documentary video "Juggling for Success" describes how Larry Graves, a teacher from Hazel Dell School in Vancouver, WA, started using juggling in his classroom. Juggling then caught on in other classrooms and had a profound impact on school culture, discipline, and academics. For more info about this video, discount juggling supplies, or other classroom resources, contact Nels at (716) 575-5378.*