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Agility in CrossFit Kids

Agility refers to the "ability to quickly transition from one movement pattern to another" (Glassman). This is what we often recognize in athletes as quickness and ease of movement. For example, a soccer player dribbling the ball down the field must utilize his body to carry out multiple movements and directional changes at a moment's notice. An accomplished soccer player is nimble, displaying the ability to quickly and precisely change the body's direction. We might say "he can turn on a dime." Agility, like the other general physical skills, does not stand alone. It requires "balance, coordination, reflexes, speed and strength" (Wikipedia) and is improved through consistent practice that brings about changes to the nervous system. Agility training has at its core those movements which require the individual to repeatedly practice and improve the ability to effectively change velocity and direction.

Displays of agility are not isolated to the sporting field. For most of us the need to "transition" is more necessary to daily life. Dodging a moving object such as a teenager on a skateboard, spying and avoiding a stray glob of chewed gum on the ground, and running through a crowded airport all require agility.

CrossFit kids become more agile by practicing movements that force repeated changes in direction and fast reaction times. The most obvious of these is the use of an agility ladder. Hopping forward on one foot or two between rungs and high-stepping or side-stepping down the ladder all improve agility. Hopscotch is a great way to challenge the

agility of a child. Obstacle courses that require directional changes and weaving in-and-out are effective training tools. Olympic lifts highlight agility by improving one's ability to shift seamlessly from one movement pattern to another. For example, the snatch requires the athlete to begin with an upward jump then immediately reverse directions to drop under the bar. Additionally, at Brand X we utilize some of our martial arts drills for the purpose of improving agility.

Here are a few games we use to improve agility.

Shuttle Run Set up the drill by placing markers (i.e., draw lines, place cones, mark with tape) at increasing distances from a finish line, approximately 5 yards apart. Line the kids up side-by-side at the finish line. When you say "go," the kids sprint to the first marker, touch the ground, explosively turn around and sprint back to the finish line. Immediately, they explosively turn and sprint to the second marker, touch the ground, turn around and sprint back to the finish line. This continues until they have traveled back and forth between all the markers. We usually have the kids hit 3 or 4 target points. It is important that transitions from forward to back are made quickly. The faster the kids are changing directions, the better. You can even turn this into a race, but pay close attention. Some kids will have an inclination to skip bending down and touching the target point in the interest of winning the race. A reminder that it is mandatory to touch the marker line may be helpful.

Snake Drill Line the kids up side-by-side, spacing them a sufficient distance apart that they will be able to run between one another. On "go," the first person at the left of the line turns and begins to run in an "S" pattern (like a slalom) between the other kids until she reaches the end of the line. Quickly shift all the kids to the left, being careful to maintain the space between them. (This may require a few practice runs to allow the kids to figure out how far to shift each time.) The person who is now at the beginning of the line begins to "snake" through the line. Once she reaches the end, the entire line shifts left again. Continue until everyone has snaked through the line.

Variation: Use a medicine ball to increase the difficulty of the drill. Have the kids hold a medicine ball as they snake through the line. In this drill, each child travels to the end of the line and back. He passes the ball to the next person in line, and then runs back to the end of the line as the entire group does the shift to the left. Then the next child in line begins to snake down the line and back. Continue until everyone has snaked back and forth through the line.

Agility 101 for Kids

Jack be nimble,
Jack be quick,
Jack jump over the candlestick.

You've likely heard this rhyme dozens of times. What you probably didn't realize is that it is describing agility. To be agile means to be able to make fast and accurate changes in direction. If Jack is nimble, it means he can move "quickly and lightly." Have you ever played tag during recess? You used agility to dart back and forth, quickly moving one way and then the other in order to avoid being caught. Tennis, soccer and football are all examples of sports that have high demands for agility. In each, a player is required to move left, right, forward and backward without prior notice. As the ball is volleyed or passed, or a fellow player tries to tackle you or steal the ball, you have to react and move in many directions with lightning speed.

Agility is also required in daily life. Imagine walking across a field with your friends. You're laughing and talking. Suddenly, you notice a huge hole in the ground right in front of you. You quickly sidestep the hole and, without thinking any more about it, you continue the conversation with your friends. You quickly moved your entire body in a different direction in order to avoid stepping in the hole. That is a display of agility.