

Position Statement

Dodgeball Is Not an Appropriate Physical Education Activity

Position

SHAPE America – Society of Health and Physical Educators reasserts its position that dodgeball is *not* an appropriate activity for the K-12 school setting because it does not support a positive school climate, the application of appropriate social behaviors or the goal of physical education.

Rationale

With an increasing focus on students' social and emotional learning, most schools have enacted policies aimed at fostering a positive school climate. Traditional dodgeball, in which the objective is to eliminate opponents by hitting them with a ball, undermines the goal of creating and maintaining a positive school climate. It also subverts the goal of physical education, which SHAPE America considers is “to develop physically literate individuals who have the knowledge, skills and confidence to enjoy a lifetime of healthful physical activity” (SHAPE America – Society of Health and Physical Educators, 2014, p. 11).

In addition, including dodgeball in the physical education curriculum:

- Does not support SHAPE America's [50 Million Strong by 2029](#) commitment, whose goal is to ensure that all of America's young people are empowered to lead healthy and active lives through effective health and physical education programs; and
- Does not meet the criteria for being a reasonable choice for ensuring that all students have a positive, supportive physical education experience, develop physical and health-related competence and confidence, and engage in moderate- to vigorous-intensity physical activity for the recommended 50 percent of class time (NASPE, 2004; SHAPE America, 2015).

Positive School Climate and Appropriate Social Behavior

It is school leaders' job to promote positive school climate and minimize opportunities for aggressive behavior and lessen opportunities for bullying to occur. One of the first behaviors that a child learns in school is to refrain from hitting others, and that carries through to all grade levels. Allowing dodgeball to be played in a school setting before, during or after school creates an opportunity for aggressive behavior that teachers and school administrators would not allow in any other circumstance. Giving students license to exhibit aggressive behavior, as dodgeball does, contradicts the goal of creating and maintaining a positive school climate.

Dodgeball Is Not an Appropriate Physical Education Activity (Cont.)

The K-12 school setting is a place where students not only acquire content knowledge, but also learn acceptable social behaviors. Many schools have a dress code to which students must adhere. While students can learn equally well in whatever they wear, adhering to a school's dress code prepares them for life after graduation, when they enter the workforce and must dress in a professional manner. School policy and procedures are put in place to teach students acceptable social behavior that will apply outside of school.

Dodgeball represents an abdication of a school's responsibility to teach acceptable social behaviors and to foster a positive school climate.

The Goal of Physical Education

To attain the goal of creating physically literate individuals, schools need to provide students with opportunities to develop skills through meaningful physical activity. Research shows that many U.S. children and adolescents do not engage in enough physical activity to build the foundation for a healthy lifestyle, indicating that physical educators should focus on offering lessons that keep *all* students moderately to vigorously active for at least half of all instructional time. For example:

- Roughly three-quarters of U.S. children and youths ages 6-19 do not meet the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' 2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans recommendation of at least 60 minutes of moderate- to vigorous-intensity physical activity per day (National Physical Activity Plan Alliance, 2016).
- Some 18 percent of U.S. young people ages 6- 19 are overweight; a 260 percent increase since 1980 (Ogden & Carroll, 2010).

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) categorizes dodgeball as a moderate-intensity activity, meaning that participants burn an average of 3.5 to 7 kilocalories (kcal) per minute. For comparison, CDC classifies other common physical education activities such as field or rollerblade hockey, running, skipping, jumping rope and performing jumping jacks as vigorous-intensity activities, meaning that participants burn an average of 7.0 or more kcal per minute (CDC, n.d.). Because many participants are eliminated from dodgeball games within a few minutes (or seconds), only *some* game participants engage in even moderate-intensity activity long enough to be of benefit.

Helping students build a commitment and desire to be physically active and make healthy choices — especially in the face of increasing sedentary behavior — is a huge challenge. Offering dodgeball, which often leads to teasing and criticism, only adds to that challenge, as indicated by a recent study in which researchers found that students who experienced “teasing during physical activity [engaged in] lower levels of physical activity compared with peers who experienced less criticism during activity” (Jensen, Cushing & Elledge, 2013).

Given the minimal amount of time that most physical educators have in which to prepare students with the confidence, competence and desire necessary for being physically active,

even modified dodgeball is not a reasonable choice. Activities that allow *all* students to practice skills are more likely to increase enjoyment of physical activity and promote physical literacy for students at all skill levels.

Countering Arguments for Including Dodgeball

Some educators offer arguments for including dodgeball in the curriculum or as an activity during the school day. Here are some of the most common arguments:

- *Students won't be hurt playing dodgeball because we use foam balls.*
- *Dodgeball provides a means of practicing some important physical skills, including running, dodging, throwing and catching.*
- *We've changed the rules so that students who are eliminated are recycled into the game.*
- *Students like dodgeball.*

Even with modifications such as using softer balls and recycling eliminated players back into play, dodgeball is still a game in which the goal is to hit other students with an object, and that promotes bullying behavior, which SHAPE America considers inappropriate teaching practice (SHAPE America, 2009). Physical educators have a wide array of appropriate and enjoyable physical activities from which to choose in their efforts to build knowledge, skills and confidence within all students.

Conclusion

Dodgeball is an activity in which the sole purpose is to eliminate players by hitting them with an object. SHAPE America acknowledges that physical educators can make modifications to the traditional game of dodgeball in an effort to mitigate its negative effects. Even with such modifications, however, offering dodgeball in physical education class or other times during the school day serves only to alienate many students from physical activity. Instead, educators should choose to offer activities that help *all* students become physically literate individuals and that contribute to a positive school climate.

References

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