

# 20 Reasons Your Preschooler Should Do Gymnastics



## That Have Nothing to Do with Learning Gymnastics

by Anne Josephson

**W**hat if Johnny never learns a cartwheel? Or how about if Janie never masters holding a handstand? Would there still be any value in putting your preschooler in a gymnastics class?

Yes, I say.

Absolutely, yes.

In addition to it being a lot of fun, here are twenty reasons your preschool aged child should do gymnastics that have nothing to do with learning gymnastics.

- 1. Separation.** Learning to leave your parent or caregiver in the lobby while you go into class is the beginning of learning how to separate before a child goes to school. The ability to adjust to new situations is an important part of a preschoolers' education.
- 2. Following directions.** Gymnastics teaches kids to follow multi-stepped directions. Going around the obstacle course and remember what to do at each station is far more than gymnastics training.
- 3. Following safety rules.** Listening to the rules of how we

keep ourselves safe in the gym helps children learn how to follow rules at home and school. It places an importance on the concept of personal safety that is relevant for life.

- 4. Patience.** No one likes waiting, especially 3, 4 and 5 year olds! Practicing standing in line for short periods of time and containing your excitement as you wait for your turn on the trampoline are just a couple ways gymnastics teaches patience.

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- 5. Working cooperatively.** From partner drills to moving a mat together, gymnastics teaches kids to work together for a common purpose.
- 6. Responsibility in cleaning up.** Learning to put your carpet spot or

cartwheel mat back into a pile is an important skill and one that many parents will be grateful to have their preschooler master next time there are Legos all over the house!

- 7. Conflict resolution.** It's not easy when you don't get to be first. Or you don't get the pink poly spot. Or you are unable to stand next to your favorite friend in line. Gymnastics teaches these lessons and helps children learn appropriate ways to resolve their conflicts.

- 8. Interacting appropriately with adults and peers.** Learning to have good manners and speak in a way that is respectful is an important skill for preschoolers to learn. Gymnastics class helps a child learn to treat the teacher with respect and how to navigate social dynamics with their preschool peers.

- 9. Persistence.** Gymnasts must try and try again to achieve even the simplest of skills. Gymnastics teaches kids to stay with an activity until it's completed.

- 10. Discipline.** Combining listening, respect for rules and patience leads to discipline. When a child has the basics of discipline, self-discipline is the next step: the ability to self-regulate behavior.

11. **Coordination.** Gymnastics is the basis of all sports. The building blocks for athletic pursuits down the line are laid in gymnastics.

12. **Asking for help.** Young gymnasts learn how to ask for help from their coach and their classmates.

13. **Coping with jealousy.** Inevitably another child will learn a skill more quickly, run a race faster or be chosen to lead the line for the day, and your preschooler will not like it. Gymnastics class gives your child an opportunity to cope with those yucky feelings and express them appropriately.

14. **Character.** Gymnastics stresses the importance of doing the right thing, even when the teacher isn't looking. Preschool gymnasts begin developing this important skill in class.

15. **Resilience.** A four year old falling down and getting back up while trying to master a cartwheel is learning resilience, the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties.

16. **Grit.** When you learn to keep trying in order to achieve a goal, it is called grit. Educators around the nation understand the relationship

between achievement and grit. Watching that same resilient four year old persist at learning a cartwheel is laying the groundwork for a child who possesses grit.

17. **The value of effort.** Gymnastics is not an easy sport. However, if children try hard they will see progress. They will understand the relationship between effort and success.

18. **Ambition.** Setting lofty goals and believing that you have the capacity to reach them is the core of what it means to ambitious. Watching older kids fly around the gym and thinking that someday, if you work hard, that you can do that too, is the beginning of ambition.

19. **Courage.** Gymnastics can be a scary sport. It is when we face something that pushes us out of our comfort zone that we have the opportunity to develop courage. Courage is not only being brave when we fear something but it is also a trait we can call upon when we have to do something that we do not wish to do, like chores or homework, all things that preschooler will be learning to cope with in the not-too-distant future.

20. **Self-confidence.** Is it any wonder that a child who develops all of these traits also develops self-confidence? Self-confidence is, simply put, your belief in yourself. If you are able to do class on your own, following the rules and directions, getting along with your peers, understanding that you are an able learner and that failing is ok because you are ambitious, have courage and grit is it any surprise that you are self-confident?

So, while I hope all of the Johnny's and Janie's enrolled in a preschool gymnastics program learn great basic skills, have a lot of fun doing so, possibly falling in love with gymnastics and going on to stick with the sport through their childhoods, in the last analysis, these twenty traits will serve them well no matter where their athletic career goes.

Put down the iPad and take your child to the gym!



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Anne holds a B.A. from Barnard College, Columbia University and a M.S. Ed. in Educational Psychology from USC, where her focus was on how children and adolescents learn best. She is the parent of four daughters ages 16 to 20.

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