

# How Gymnastics Helps Your Child Succeed in School (Backed by Harvard Research)

*Posted on blog by Anne Josephson of JAG Gym*

**H**arvard School of Education released their findings on their latest research project; and, they could have simply titled it "Why Your Kid Should do Gymnastics if You Want Them to Develop the Kind of Character That Helps Them Succeed at School."

Okay, it doesn't exactly roll off the tongue...but it cuts to the core of what kids need to succeed in school and why gymnastics is the perfect place to develop it.

You see, the good folks at Harvard in conjunction with 4,000 UK teenagers undertook a study that examined the characteristics that best predicted a student's future academic success and that characteristic is...Grit.

Grit, which was defined as having determination, courage, persistence, a 'growth mindset' and the ability to maintain a balanced lifestyle, was a better predictor than intelligence in predicting which kids succeeded in the classroom.

Gymnastics develops determination. Determination is that quality that makes you continue trying to do or achieve something that is difficult. Simply watch a beginning gymnast learn a cartwheel or a pullover, and you are seeing determination in action.

Gymnastics cultivates courage. Tumbling across a 4 inch wide beam? Running full speed at a standing object and then jumping (or flipping!) over it? Swinging on a bar 7 feet in the air? Defying gravity on a regular basis? Gymnasts routinely make the choice to confront discomfort, fear and to do the right thing even when it costs more than they want to pay. All hallmarks of courage.

Gymnastics plans persistence. Fall down seven times, get up eight is a Japanese proverb turned gymnasts' motto. Developing that quality that allows someone to continue doing something or trying to do something even though it is difficult...that is not only the definition of persistence but is practically the definition of gymnastics practice.

Gymnastics garners a growth mindset. It's practically impossible to not have a growth mindset, the belief that our most basic abilities can be developed through dedication and hard work, and be a gymnast. Otherwise, why would a gymnast even bother with practice? Turns out that a growth mindset helps create a love of learning and a resilience essential to great accomplishments. Ever met a gymnast who didn't love to learn new things or who accomplished something without having to rise in the face of difficulty or after a set back? Me neither.

Gymnastics demands a balanced lifestyle. Dr Christina Hinton, a neuroscientist and faculty member at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, said: "Our results suggest that grit does not require pushing yourself at all costs, but rather cultivating healthy emotional regulation skills and effective learning strategies." Gymnasts understand this. The importance of getting sufficient sleep, nutrition, making time for gymnastics, school, family, faith and other extracurriculars are all things even our youngest athletes learn.

Still not convinced? Then consider this: an NCAA study was conducted that showed over 35% of gymnasts at the college level achieved a GPA of 3.5 or better. Over 90% of college students involved in NCAA gymnastics graduated, a much higher rate than students who didn't participate in gymnastics. More academic awards were given to gymnasts than to any other college sport by as much as two to three times. Additionally, more gymnasts received NCAA post-grad scholarships in the past 5 years than any other female sport.

Like I said: "Why your kid should do gymnastics if you want them to develop the kind of character that helps them succeed at school."



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It is our belief that your child is taking part in the greatest physical activity in the world. Gymnastics is highly comprehensive that requires the participant to move their body through every plane imaginable. Once a child gains a foundation of movement in gymnastics they are well prepared to take on virtually any sport they chose. Whether your child is here for general fitness, to cross-train, or with the goals of becoming a competitive gymnast, it is our commitment to create an experience that is fun and inspiring.

### Things to know ...

1. Be prepared to go upside down.
2. If you have long hair have it tied back so it does not inhibit your vision.
3. Wear shorts and a t-shirt or a leotard. If your clothes are too baggy they may inhibit your movement when you are upside down.
4. Do not wear any jewelry. Sharp or loose objects could cause you harm.
5. Many of the surfaces you will be on can be slippery so barefoot is best.
6. It is safest if you do not chew gum while you are doing gymnastics.
7. Do not get on any of the equipment without your instructor's permission.

## Tumbling to Academic Success

By Debra Em Wilson, M.A., Reading Specialist

The more a child tumbles, climbs, creeps, and crawls, the more densely wired the brain becomes for academic success. Movement is the architect of a child's brain. The two hemispheres of the brain are designed to constantly communicate with one another. The left side of the brain controls the right side of the body, and vice versa. Bilateral activities, common to all gymnastic programs, require both sides of the body to work together and separately.

Coordinated movement patterns create efficiency in the brain. Efficient pathways create fluent readers who complete reading tasks easier. For example, during reading, the left hemisphere attends to letters and sequence of words, while the right side of the brain focuses on comprehending what is read. Reading fluency depends on an intimate conversation between the two hemispheres of the brain creating a clear signal.

Bouncing on the trampoline, tumbling down a mat, swinging from the bars – all these activities help with the brain and integrate the vestibular system. Located in the inner ear, the vestibular system is intricately connected with the brain. Its job is to make sense of all perceived sensory information from the environment and tell us where our bodies are in space. Like the hub of a wheel, the vestibular system integrates vision, hearing, balance, and skin sensations. If children have poor sensory processing skills, they may have a difficult time learning gymnastics skills or regulating behavior. Weaknesses observed in gymnastics classes may lead to discovering that the child might struggle in school as well.

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