

# How to Start a *Rhythmic Gymnastics* Program

Photo of Laura Zeng by Grace Chiu



Laura  
Zeng

# How to Start a

# Rhythmic

## WHAT IS RHYTHMIC GYMNASTICS? GETTING STARTED!

Do you want to learn the ropes and get the ball rolling with a thrilling new program for your club without jumping through hoops, but will help you tie a ribbon on the success of your business? Get a rope, ball, clubs, hoop and ribbon and start a rhythmic gymnastics program!

With some space, a few hoops and balls to start, and a curriculum of basic skills, a rhythmic gymnastics program can be born. At the basic level, rhythmic gymnastics is all about developing physical fitness, strength, flexibility, agility, balance and eye-hand-foot-coordination—all of which girls and women of all ages seek for their own health and physical well-being. By starting with basic body positions and apparatus skills through progressions and interactive games, girls will have fun and develop their abilities in the sport of rhythmic gymnastics.

To start out, only basic gymnastics equipment, such as folding mats or any floor area and either traditional or alternative hand apparatus, is needed. This basic equipment helps for teaching introductory skills and progressions for each of the apparatus. Using a step-by-step approach allows a coach or facility (existing Artistic club, dance space, local open gyms for other sports, Park Districts, etc.) to implement a program more easily and grow as needed.

Rhythmic gymnastics is a wonderful activity for children. A variety of benefits can be achieved through participating in rhythmic gymnastics even before entering the competitive levels, and children are immediately drawn to the music and movement with the hand equipment. The most important aspects of gymnastics are aiding children in their physical, mental and social development and allowing them to have fun and be free with their imagination and creativity. If your program achieves these objectives, you are well on your way! Be sure to take the time to develop your program's curriculum, prioritize safety, and communicate with your athletes and their parents.

## FOR WHOM IS RHYTHMIC GYMNASTICS?

Rhythmic gymnastics is really a sport for EVERYONE! When I decided to create my program, I wanted to make the sport available to everyone who wanted to try it! Over the past nine years we have offered

satellite programs in various local preschools, after school programs, camps, dance schools or gymnastics schools and every child we worked with has enjoyed it and benefited from it! Our current offering of



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classes includes options for all ages from three to 18 and all levels from recreational kids to elite gymnasts who train and compete in international competitions.

## STRUCTURE OF A RHYTHMIC GYMNASTICS PROGRAM

Clubs should develop their programs and class offerings to meet the needs of their clients and the community. Below are examples of various levels, and often rhythmic clubs give tailored names to these general levels (ex: Lil' Leapers, Rising Stars, etc.)

- **Preschool rhythmic gymnastics**—the focus is development of gross and fine motor skills using structured activities, obstacle courses, music and alternative apparatus to learn coordination, body awareness, basic body positions and shapes.
- **Recreational rhythmic gymnastics**—a club may choose to divide this group of athletes by age or skill level, such as beginner, intermediate and advanced. Typically athletes in these classes are school-age children. A curriculum may focus on basic skills and progression with the body and with each of the five apparatuses.
- **Pre-competitive and competitive rhythmic gymnastics teams**—USA Gymnastics provides structure for Levels 1–8. Levels 1 and 2 are developmental levels and can be used as non-competitive, achievement-oriented programming or pre-team. Levels 3–8 are part of the Junior Olympic Program and include a compulsory component.

A typical session may run 8–12 weeks. Recreational classes may meet one or two times per week, enabling girls to achieve tangible goals within each session. A session can begin at any time but usually starts as fall, winter, or spring sessions.

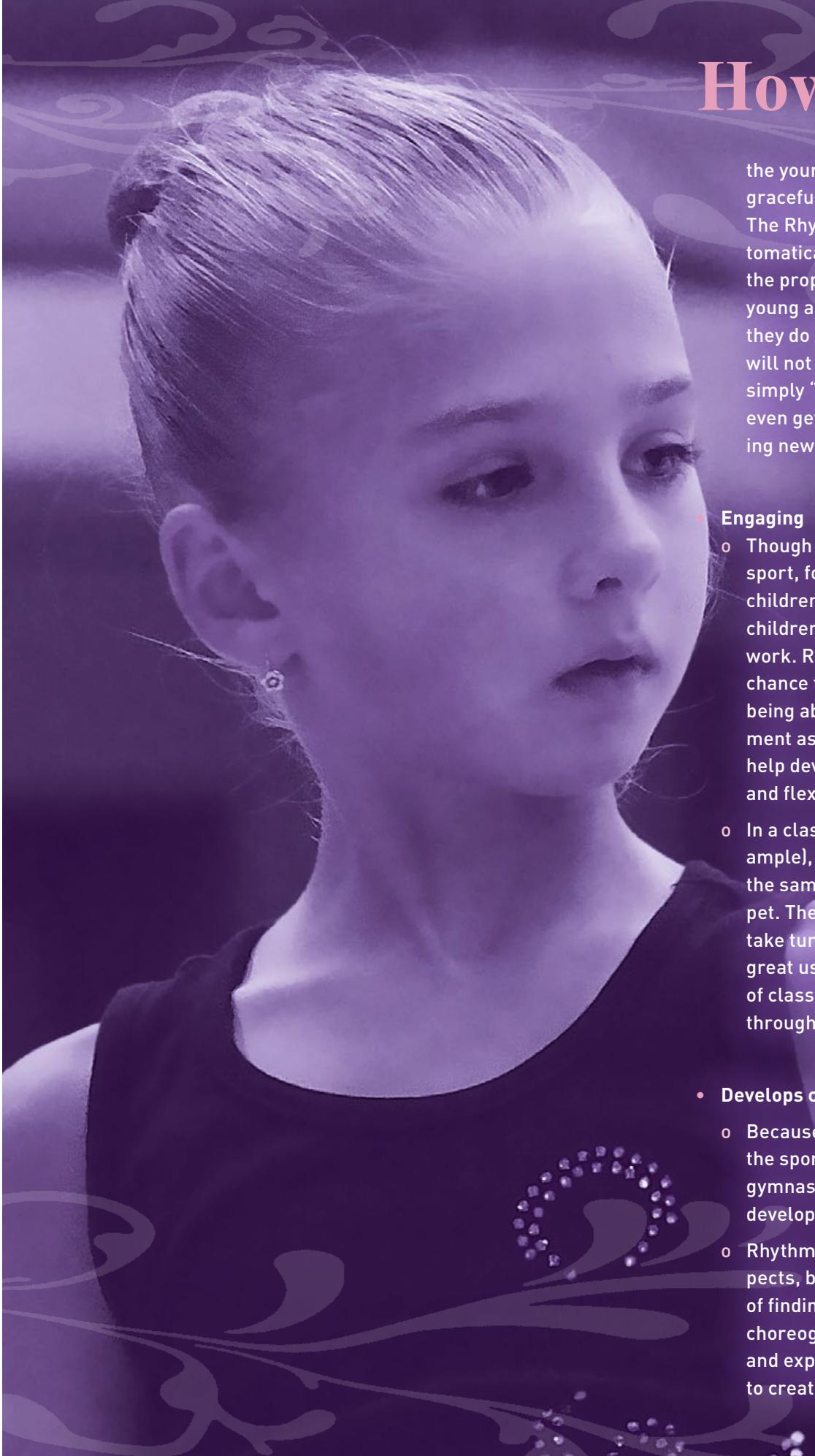
Many gyms offer introductory summer programs or weekly camps when enrollment is typically lower.

## WHY PARTICIPATE IN RHYTHMIC GYMNASTICS?

When we ask our new clients why they chose rhythmic gymnastics, the parents tell us they want a sport that develops “everything”: flexibility, strength, coordination, beauty, self-confidence, mental power and discipline in a safe, injury-free environment. The kids keep it simple: *BECAUSE IT'S FUN!*

- **Low-risk**
- **Develops physical fitness, eye-hand and foot-eye coordination, motor skills, rhythm**
- **Develops life skills:** teamwork, self-confidence, responsibility, goal-setting, sportsmanship and friendship
- **Fun and beneficial**
  - We have observed over the years that Rhythmic Gymnastics gently sculpts

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the young girl's body and mind into a lean, graceful, poised, confident young woman. The Rhythmic Gymnastics equipment automatically corrects the body posture and the proper basic technique in children as young as three years old. For instance, if they do not straighten their knees, the ball will not roll on their legs. They kids are simply "playing," sometimes they don't even get that they are exercising or learning new skills.

- **Engaging**

- o Though ballet is the foundation of the sport, for many young, preschool-age children, it is often difficult for very active children to do repetitive barre work/floor work. Rhythmic gymnastics offers the chance to develop those skills while also being able to have more dynamic movement as well as utilize hand apparatus to help develop grace, coordination, strength and flexibility.
- o In a class setting with 10 children (for example), all 10 children can be working at the same time with apparatus on the carpet. There is little to no waiting in line to take turns or be spotted which becomes a great use of class time, when the majority of class time is spent moving and learning through movement.

- **Develops creativity, musicality, artistry**

- o Because music is such a regular part of the sport (used for all routines), rhythmic gymnastics offers a nice opportunity to develop musicality.
- o Rhythmic has not only the athletic aspects, but also has the creative process of finding music that matches the athlete, choreographing the routine to interpret and express that piece of music and finally to creating a leotard and equipment that

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finishes this piece of art. It is an all-inclusive form of the arts: music, movement, design. This makes it different from other sports, from ballet or from acrobatics as it combines aspects from all.

## EQUIPMENT

Rhythmic gymnastics equipment/apparatus:

- Rope
- Hoop
- Ball
- Clubs
- Ribbon

Developmental rhythmic gymnasts also love to have fun and learn with alternative rhythmic equipment: scarves, bean bags, balloons, Koosh balls, scoops, sponge balls, Frisbees, punch balls, etc. (See *How To Start a Rhythmic Program* and *Building Blocks*.)

## HOW DO I START A PROGRAM/ LEARN SKILLS?

The courses offered through USA Gymnastics University and the materials referenced below provide a wealth of information to help you get started and are the best available for rhythmic gymnastics. All of these courses and materials are available through the USA Gymnastics website ([usagym.org](http://usagym.org)).

- **Rhythmic Gymnastics Levels 1 and 2 Workbook and Training DVD:** a package which provides examples for beginning developmental skills.
- **Rhythmic Compulsory Program Materials:** an entry point into learning rhythmic gymnastics routines, the set contains examples of body and apparatus skills and routines for Levels 3–5.
- **Rhythmic Developmental Coaches Course**
- **Rhythmic Junior Olympic Coaches Course**



- **Fundamentals of Gymnastics Instruction**—This online educational course provides a wealth of information on topics ranging from safety to coaching principles to curriculum development and also includes video clips of beginning and intermediate gymnastics movements and skills.
- **How To Start A Rhythmic Program and Building Blocks: A Developmental Approach to Pre-School Rhythmic Gymnastics:** includes information about getting programs started, teaching classes, and keeping interest.

# How to Start a *Rhythmic Gymnastics Program*

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*"I recommend allowing a 10 –15 minute session during your regular recreational gymnastics classes in which students may work with the ribbon, hoop and ball with music. Immediately you will see the excitement and joy on their faces."*

— Alla Svirsky, Los Angeles School of Gymnastics, Olympic coach & USA Gymnastics Hall of Fame member

*"Start by having a tot class and an older class. As you gauge the interest, you can create a Pre-Team level that focuses on preparing the gymnasts for Level 3 or 4 depending on ability. There are great resources out there to get a curriculum started. Most importantly when you start... it needs to be fun! Kids LOVE dancing with the ribbons. It is important to educate yourself as much as possible. Read through the handbooks online, watch some competitions. Many folks are unaware of rhythmic and the benefits it offers. The video offers a way to catch people's attention and hopefully engage their curiosity. Awareness is key: participate in a community event, parade, or festival."*

— Melissa Bert, North Shore Academy

*"When I started the program, I knew almost nothing about the sport. I learned it 'on the go,' from the professional coaches I hired. The beauty of it is that this sport does not require a big initial financial investment. One can start a program with a set of 12 hoops, balls, ribbons and ropes in a school classroom!"*

— Smaranda Moisescu, Rhythmic Dreams

*"The girls are divided by age and ability. In the Queens gym they are categorized by leotard color. i.e. pink, blue, red, black, etc."*

— Yvonne Cleland, Isadora

Remember to contact a Mentor Club and reach out for assistance! All of the clubs are eager to help you develop your program!

## WHAT HAS RHYTHMIC GYMNASTICS DONE FOR YOUR ATHLETES?

*"Rhythmic has given them discipline, poise, a good work ethic, time management skills, ability to accept constructive criticism, concentration skills, lots of local, national and international friendships. Rhythmic has taught them about good sportsmanship, the ability to overcome adversity, and delayed gratification."*

— Isadora Rhythmic Gymnastics, NY

*"The program that we have developed is based on a simple but very powerful idea: we empower children to reach BEYOND what they think is possible. They go home after their first class in awe at what their bodies learned to do! We always have one more new trick to teach with the equipment, which keeps them engaged and interested in the sport."*

— Rhythmic Dreams, MA

*"Training in rhythmic gymnastics teaches gymnasts to be especially deliberate in the control of both their body and equipment. Working in groups of two, four, or six children develops a positive spirit and encourages camaraderie with teammates."*

— Los Angeles School of Gymnastics, CA

*"We have gotten to watch our athletes grow in many ways. I have watched artistic gymnasts come and learn to move freely with expression. Incorporating the ballet technique has added elegance and precision to movement. Rhythmic teaches excellent hand-eye coordination that can be perfected by the thought of scientific principles and much determination. Confidence comes as gymnasts learn routines and skills that they master. Even the quiet, reserved gymnast can go to the floor and perform a beautiful routine."*

— North Shore Academy of Gymnastics, WI

# Rhythmic Gymnastics MENTOR CLUB LIST

**TRACEY CALLAHAN MOLNAR**  
(Rhythmic Author and Coach)  
[avispuela@aol.com](mailto:avispuela@aol.com)

**WENDY HILLIARD**  
Wendy Hilliard Gymnastics Foundation  
[wendy@wendyhilliard.org](mailto:wendy@wendyhilliard.org)

**BALA GYMNASTICS**  
[www.balagymnastics.com](http://www.balagymnastics.com)  
Contact: Valeriya Neikova Shopa  
[balagymnastics@gmail.com](mailto:balagymnastics@gmail.com)  
Location: Pennsylvania

**BOSTON RHYTHMICS/  
RHYTHMIC DREAMS**  
[www.rhythmicdreams.com](http://www.rhythmicdreams.com)  
Contact: Smaranda Moisescu  
[smaranda@rhythmicdreams.com](mailto:smaranda@rhythmicdreams.com)  
Location: Massachusetts

**ELITE SPORTS COMPLEX**  
[www.elitesportscomplex.com](http://www.elitesportscomplex.com)  
Contact: Joni Spata  
[joni\\_spata@yahoo.com](mailto:joni_spata@yahoo.com)  
Location: Illinois

**FREEDOM RHYTHMIC GYMNASTICS  
ACADEMY**  
[www.freedomrgacademy.com](http://www.freedomrgacademy.com)  
Contact: Lilly Esipova Downs  
[freedomrgacademy@gmail.com](mailto:freedomrgacademy@gmail.com)  
Location: New Jersey

**NORTH SHORE ACADEMY OF  
GYMNASTICS**  
[www.northshoregymnastics-wi.com](http://www.northshoregymnastics-wi.com)  
Contact: Melissa Bert  
[mavert@uwmalumni.com](mailto:mavert@uwmalumni.com)  
Location: Wisconsin

## OAKLAND RHYTHMICS

Contact: Karyn Glover  
[kjlglover@gmail.com](mailto:kjlglover@gmail.com)  
Location: Michigan

**RHYTHMIC BRAINS**  
[www.rhythmicbrains.shinoharaacademy.org](http://www.rhythmicbrains.shinoharaacademy.org)

Contact: Nancy & Shino Shinohara  
[shinoharaacademy@gmail.com](mailto:shinoharaacademy@gmail.com)  
Location: Georgia

## RHYTHMIX

[www.rhythmixinc.com](http://www.rhythmixinc.com)  
Contact: Irina Polyachenko  
[ipolyach@gmail.com](mailto:ipolyach@gmail.com)  
Location: Illinois

## SAN DIEGO RHYTHMIC GYMNASTICS ACADEMY

[www.sandiegorhythmicgymnastics.com](http://www.sandiegorhythmicgymnastics.com)  
Contact: Alla Zubkis  
[allazubkis2002@yahoo.com](mailto:allazubkis2002@yahoo.com)  
Location: California

## SAN DIEGO RHYTHMS

[www.sdrhythms.com](http://www.sdrhythms.com)  
Contact: Sofia Minevich  
[sofia@sdrhythms.com](mailto:sofia@sdrhythms.com)  
Location: California

## TAMPA BAY RHYTHMICS

[www.tampabayrhythmics.com](http://www.tampabayrhythmics.com)  
Contact: Tyana Marlowe  
[tampabayrhythmics@verizon.net](mailto:tampabayrhythmics@verizon.net)  
Location: Florida



Caroline Hunt  
[chunt@usagym.org](mailto:chunt@usagym.org)  
USA Gymnastics  
Senior Director of Rhythmic Program  
317-829-5629



Jayme Vincent  
[jvincent@usagym.org](mailto:jvincent@usagym.org)  
USA Gymnastics  
Rhythmic Program Coordinator  
317.829.5662

