

The hidden treasures of play

Active play is seen as a universal right for children of all ages. Even before a baby can walk or talk regular active play time helps to form lifelong physical activity patterns, and is above all important for their body and brain development.

Learning through daily active play promotes the growth of children's mental, physical, social, emotional, and language skills.

What is active play?

Active play is physical activity with regular bursts of a moderate to vigorous pace, such as crawling, jumping, or running. Active play should raise children's heart rate and make them 'huff and puff'.

Active play can occur;

- indoors or outdoors
- alone or with friends and family
- in *structured* settings, such as swimming lessons or sport
- in *unstructured* settings, such as backyards or parks



**MOVE,
PLAY
AND GO**

A time for active play, everyday!

It is crucial for all children to be active for at least 60 minutes everyday. This time can be built up throughout the day, and includes finding time for outdoor play.

Outdoor active play gives children more freedom to;

- use large and small muscle groups

- learn how their body moves
- explore nature and make noise
- move in a range of ways, directions, and paces
- practice skills, such as skipping, hopping, or climbing

As children grow, the time and range of chances to be active should increase. This may include slowly increasing walking and/or running distances, and building more play skills such as catching, dancing, or swimming.

The unseen riches of active play

An important part of growth is giving children the chance to be active whenever possible. Active play therefore, does not always have to be organised and have set time limits, equipment, or instructions. Allowing children to 'make up' their own play lets them try new things, learn from their mistakes, and above all enjoy being active all whilst moving at their own pace.

Active play does not just fill children's time. It is through play that children of all ages form lifelong skills, such as:

- decision making and problem solving skills
- resilience
- self-belief and self-confidence
- independence
- creativity and imagination
- skills in dealing with change and the mindset to 'keep going'

Just as important is children's ability to express feelings, laugh, have fun, and mix with other people. This helps to develop:

- communication and social skills
- a sense of belonging
- an understanding of social rules
- friendships
- a sense of 'give and take'
- patience

- team work skills
- an understanding of children, such as those with disabilities or from different cultures

Suitable play for my child

Active play can provide children with the chance to explore, discover and learn new things in their own way.

To make sure children enjoy being active everyday, children need to feel success in the activities and games they try. Therefore, the type of play offered to children must match their social, mental and physical abilities. For example, practising to catch with a larger, slower moving ball can give your child feelings of success to then try a smaller, faster moving ball.

Children build movement skills and self-confidence in their own time, such as learning to skip and hop. It is important to keep in mind that play skills should not always be judged by age. Nor should children of the same age be compared.

Play skills can depend on;

- starting abilities
- past experiences
- practice and repetition
- support from others
- positive and safe places to play

Children are naturally curious and eager to have fun. Children need to be given the chance to 'have a go' and practise new skills as often as possible. This includes giving helpful hints and praise, especially when they are trying something new. Playing together can also make sure skills continue to improve and children enjoy being active.

How can I provide suitable play for my child?

Being active everyday does not always mean travelling far, nor do you need a lot of money. There are plenty of low cost, local play spaces, such as the park, that you and your child can enjoy.

Here are some examples of how to be active everyday, even just for 10 to 20 minutes a few times a day.

Toddlers:

Toddlers are very curious and eager to explore, especially as they learn to deal with new spaces and people.

Developmental needs

- standing, sitting or lying on the tummy in the early months of life
- play time with others
- outdoor play
- touching, reaching and grasping of objects

Active play ideas: 0-1years

- dancing or swaying to music, shakers, bells, rhymes
- lying on new surfaces- grass, leaves, fluffy blankets
- grasping, reaching for soft balls, rattles, pompoms, leaves
- tummy-time practise lifting the head to the sound of your voice, clapping or rattles
- crawling on pillows, bean bags

Active play ideas: 1-2years

- walking barefoot on surfaces, such as leaves, grass, sand
- different sized objects/toys to grasp, throw, or kick
- climbing and balancing games
- hiding under or waving colourful scarves, ribbons
- playing with mud, boxes, newspapers, old containers
- clapping, singing and dancing

Preschool years:

Children at this age like to be in control of their own play area and are very creative. They enjoy free play and have a growing ability to state their thoughts and ideas.

Developmental needs

- indoor and outdoor free play
- play time with others
- simple play items to build imagination
- moving in different directions
- coordination, strength, and balance

Active play ideas

- simple play items- boxes, buckets, blocks
- dancing to music
- pushing, pulling, chasing, climbing

- dress ups, imitation games
- walking and balancing with objects
- outdoor play areas- bushes, trees, puddles, uneven ground
- walking to or from, local places - preschool or the park
- helping in the garden

Early primary school:

Children in early primary school are still eager to try and learn new things. Play time with other children and building social skills are important to this age group.

Developmental needs

- chances to explore and create games
- try junior sports and activities with tactics and rules
- practice and repetition
- play time with others
- new play experiences that may test limits

Active play ideas

- simple play items- boxes, tyres, cushions, ropes, balls
- junior sport, such as Kanga Cricket, Netta Netball
- catching, throwing, hitting and running games with stop-start patterns
- new skills- skipping ropes, trampolines, throwing at targets, swimming
- dancing, making up a concert
- explore parks, rocks, bridges
- walking or riding to and from, local places, such as school
- gardening or vacuuming
- making an obstacle course or treasure hunt

Mid-late primary school:

Older children can enjoy being in control of their own choices and like having more responsibility. Friendship and peer approval are very important to this age group.

Developmental needs

- try a range of sports and activities (team and individual)
- regular family play time - going to the park or for bike rides
- parental support and role modelling
- outdoor play
- chances for imaginative, 'made up' play

Active play ideas

- junior sport
- building a cubby house or fort
- helping with household tasks
- riding bikes or skate boards
- free back yard play
- new outdoor spaces- new parks, camping, farms, rivers
- attending youth groups, such as the YMCA or Scouts
- walking or riding to and from local places
- active school holiday activities

Offering active play in a helpful and social way allows your child to feel confident to try new activities. This can increase your child's willingness and enjoyment to practise play skills in spare time, such as riding a bike, leading to lifelong physical activity patterns.

Sometimes outdoor play is not possible however, this does not mean your child should miss out on chances to be active indoors. Making up dances to music, playing with balloons or building a space ship out of furniture holds many benefits rather than watching TV or playing on the computer.

As a general rule, children should spend no more than two hours per day watching TV or playing computer/video games.

Important tips for building positive active play spaces:

- Make active play part of your child's daily routine
- Your child needs at least 60 minutes of active play each day
- Play outdoors as often as possible
- Unstructured play lets your child move at their pace
- Allow your child to 'have a go', explore and try new things
- Active play is vital for your child's overall social and personal growth
- Provide praise and helpful hints
- As a parent or carer, be active in your own life

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