



# active play everyday

**Factsheet No: 3**



## Indoor and outdoor active play

Physical activity is vital for a child's development and lays the foundation for a healthy and active life. And when it comes to kids, the best form of physical activity is play! Both indoor and outdoor active play experiences are important for a child's development and should always be supervised by a parent or carer. It is good for children to participate in structured and unstructured play, in both indoor and outdoor settings, every day. These settings should be safe and inviting environments and any equipment or materials used should also be safe, durable and appropriate for the age, ability and cultural background of the child or children.

### What is active play?

Active play is essentially physical activity with spontaneous and occasional bursts of high energy. It can occur indoors or outdoors, alone or with friends and family. Even before children can walk, they can start playing. As they get older and learn more skills, opportunities for active play increase.

### What is structured and unstructured play?

Structured play is usually an organised form of play and it may involve rules, time limits and special equipment. Some examples include playing sports, going to play groups or kinder gym, and dance or swimming lessons. Unstructured play is less restricted and often made up on the spot by those playing. It can include such things as playing alone or with friends and family, imaginative play, going for a walk, dancing to music at home, or playing in the park.

### Why is active play so important?

**Active play is important for your child's health, growth and development. Regular activity and play has many benefits for children. These include:**

- Building strong hearts, muscles and bones.
- Developing movement and co-ordination.
- Encouraging self-esteem.
- Fostering social interaction skills.
- Improving thinking skills.
- Developing emotional skills.

### How much activity?

Active play is essential for all children. The National Physical Activity Recommendations for children are that toddlers (1 to 3 years) and preschoolers (3 to 5 years) should be physically active every day for at least three hours, spread throughout the day.<sup>1</sup>

### Where to play?

A positive, safe environment is very important for indoor or outdoor play. Parents or carers should safely supervise all activities, especially if they are near water. Being outdoors has the added benefit of providing children with space to carry out 'gross motor' activities such as jumping, running, climbing and leaping at different speeds. Outdoor play also allows children to get to know their environment and connect with nature.

To access the other factsheets in this series, please visit:



[www.kidsatplay.act.gov.au](http://www.kidsatplay.act.gov.au)



An ACT Government initiative delivered in partnership with Heart Foundation ACT

<sup>1</sup>Get Up & Grow: healthy eating and physical activity for early childhood, Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing 2009

# How do I encourage active play?

## Role of parents and carers

Parents are important role models and should be active with their children every day. They should also plan some opportunities for the whole family to be active on a weekly basis. Carers and other family members, such as grandparents, can also share in the fun and responsibility of planning activities. It's good to keep play items in your car and at home which assist in creating opportunities for play, such as blow-up beach balls, soccer balls, bats, and buckets and spades.

### Toys and equipment

Toys and equipment that can be adapted to suit different ages, levels of ability, and indoor or outdoor environments are particularly useful. You can also make use of every day recyclable products. For example, try using ice-cream containers as buckets or markers; plastic containers or milk containers as skittles; cardboard boxes as cars or tunnels; empty food cartons as building blocks; cardboard cylinders as horse sticks, golf sticks or hockey sticks; or an old bed sheet as a parachute.

Look for equipment that encourages use of both large and small muscles, as well as independent activity and social contact. Play materials should also inspire the imagination and take into account the cultural backgrounds of the children.

### Examples of activities for indoor and outdoor settings include:

(Please note that the games and activities listed below may need to be modified to suit the age of your child or children)

#### Indoor

- Throwing a soft ball into a bucket and varying the distance.
- Musical chairs.
- Crazy golf – set up an golf course using household items.
- Dancing to action songs.
- Follow the leader games.
- Making an obstacle course.
- Kicking and throwing using a soft ball.
- Play heads and shoulders, knees and toes.
- Acting out a story.
- Ten pin bowling in the hallway using recyclable products.
- Hide and seek.
- Jumping over a piece of rope or any other suitable recyclable object.

#### Outdoor

- Throwing a ball into a bucket and varying the distance.
- Potato sack races.
- Parachute games.
- Running around with paper streamers.
- Catching games.
- Follow the leader games.
- Making an obstacle course.
- Kicking and throwing using a soft ball.
- Running and stopping.
- Hitting a soft ball.
- Blowing bubbles and trying to catch them before they pop.
- Going to the local park and taking a range of equipment with you.

## Safety tips:

- Children should be participating in tasks and activities that match their skills and abilities.
- Make sure there is plenty of room for activities.
- A parent or carer should always supervise activities, especially if they are near water.
- Children should wear appropriate footwear such as well-fitted sandals or joggers. Thongs are not suitable for active play as they don't provide proper support for the feet.
- Parents and children should be sun smart when outdoors. For example, wear long-sleeved polo shirts, knee length shorts, and wide-brimmed hats. Also, make sure you regularly apply 30+ sunscreen.
- Make sure you use safe and age appropriate equipment. All equipment should be checked regularly for wear and tear.
- Children should be encouraged to drink plenty of water when they are being active or playing outdoors.

For more activity ideas please visit [www.kidsatplay.act.gov.au](http://www.kidsatplay.act.gov.au)

This website was funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing

### Acknowledgments:

The Kids at Play - Active Play and Eating Well Project would like to acknowledge the assistance of the following projects who contributed to this publication: Kids - 'Go for your life': A Victorian State Government initiative managed by The Cancer Council Victoria and Diabetes Australia - Victoria  
Romp & Chomp Structured Active Play Program: A program for early childhood settings in the City of Greater Geelong. Stagnitti, van Herwerden, Sanigorski, Wolfe and Kenna (2007) Move Baby Move, Lets Get Moving and Active Alphabet for parents, a get active Queensland initiative, produced by Sport and Recreation Queensland. (2004).

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Produced for Kids at Play - Active Play and Eating Well Project by the ACT Government in partnership with Heart Foundation ACT.

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