



# active play everyday

Factsheet No: 4



## Active play for early childhood centres and family day care

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!

### 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>

### What if the child does not appear to enjoy the activity?

Enjoyment of active play varies from child to child and getting them to participate is not always easy. Make sure you provide them with a positive, safe environment and give them plenty of encouragement and support. Simple, fun activities like playing with other children and using slower soft toys may help attract a child's interest. Repetition and other game-like challenges can also make a difference, especially if they don't involve too much competition. Skills take time to develop and children may need to try a number of play activities until they find one they like.

### The play environment

A positive, safe environment is very important for indoor or outdoor play. 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 staff members

Staff should encourage and plan for children to be active every day. They can act as role models and should join in playing with the children as often as possible. The best way to maintain variety and interest is by programming a wide range of structured and unstructured opportunities for active play and rotating the program every couple of days. By keeping a record of the activities you will be able to develop your own active play resource folder. This may be particularly useful for new staff.

## Guide for active play development\*

Age	Movement	Ideas To Encourage Active Play
3 Months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rolls to back from lying on his or her side.</li> <li>Can lie on stomach and lean on forearms.</li> <li>Head is in middle (that is, it is not always on one side).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Place child safely on the floor.</li> </ul>
6 Months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rolls from back to stomach using arms crossing over the body.</li> <li>Brings feet to mouth.</li> <li>May begin to sit.</li> <li>When lying on stomach can push up on hands.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Place child safely on the floor.</li> <li>If the child is beginning to sit, place him or her on the floor, supported with pillows.</li> </ul>
9 Months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bears weight on hands and knees and rocks back and forth.</li> <li>Sits for longer time.</li> <li>May begin to crawl – some children begin to walk.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Place child safely on floor.</li> <li>As the child gets active, ensure the environment is safe by having gates on stairs and low windows shut.</li> </ul>
1 Year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Walks holding onto furniture.</li> <li>Lowers to sitting from furniture.</li> <li>Stands alone for a few seconds.</li> <li>May be walking a few steps by themselves.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Place child on floor.</li> <li>Walking surface should be firm and even.</li> </ul>
1.5 Years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Walks backwards.</li> <li>Carries large toy while walking.</li> <li>Pushes large toys or boxes.</li> <li>Backs into chair.</li> <li>Throws ball into box.</li> <li>Beginning to run.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encourage child to walk on different surfaces such as floors, grassy areas, pathways.</li> <li>Roll a large ball near the child and encourage the child to bend and pick up and throw back.</li> <li>Have push toys available so the child can walk and push an object (this helps with stability).</li> </ul>
2 Years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Goes up and down the slide.</li> <li>Stands on tiptoes.</li> <li>Squats in play.</li> <li>Jumps from bottom step.</li> <li>Runs without bumping into things.</li> <li>Walks downstairs two feet per step without help.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Go on trips to the local park.</li> <li>Play run and chase games.</li> <li>Encourage child to walk on lots of different surfaces such as floors, grass, footpaths, sand, uneven surfaces.</li> <li>Provide opportunities to crawl over large cushions.</li> </ul>
2.5 Years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Jumps sideways and jumps backwards.</li> <li>Can jump on a trampoline holding hands with an adult.</li> <li>Begins to hop on one foot.</li> <li>Begins to use pedals on trike.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Go on trips to the local park.</li> <li>Provide a space for the child to play.</li> <li>Provide equipment such as a push-trike, tricycle, balls and large cushions.</li> </ul>
3 Years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Walks downstairs one step at a time with alternate feet.</li> <li>Climbs jungle gyms and ladders.</li> <li>Runs on toes.</li> <li>Skilled at turning corners when running.</li> <li>Balances on one leg for short time.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Go to the local park and encourage climbing on safe playground equipment.</li> <li>Play chase and jumping games.</li> </ul>
3.5 Years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stands on tiptoes for 10 seconds.</li> <li>Walks in a circle.</li> <li>Kicks a ball from a standing position.</li> <li>Rides a tricycle with pedals.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In play space, lay a plank of wood on the ground for the child to walk on to practise balancing and walking.</li> <li>Provide balls, tricycle, climbing opportunities.</li> </ul>
4 Years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Can perform a somersault.</li> <li>Maintains momentum on swing.</li> <li>Gallops.</li> <li>Kicks large rolling ball.</li> <li>Does lame duck skip (only one foot 'skips').</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Go to the local park and playground.</li> <li>Play animal games where child pretends to move like different animals.</li> <li>Play run and chase.</li> <li>Provide balls and a rope to jump over.</li> </ul>
4.5 Years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Throws a ball 3.5 metres overhand.</li> <li>Hangs from a bar using overhand grip.</li> <li>Hops forward.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Go to the local playground and park.</li> <li>Encourage play with smaller balls (e.g. a tennis ball).</li> </ul>
5 Years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Walks downstairs carrying an object.</li> <li>Runs through obstacle course avoiding objects.</li> <li>Skips forward.</li> <li>Maintains balance on a moveable platform.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Go to local playground and park.</li> <li>Provide rope for skipping, planks of wood on ground to balance on, box tunnels to crawl through, balls to throw, and objects to run around.</li> </ul>

\*Please note: This is a guide only. If you have any concerns regarding the growth and development of a child, discuss the issue with the child's parents and suggest they contact their Maternal and Child Health Nurse or General Practitioner.

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  
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