



active play everyday

Factsheet No: 2



Active play: toddlers to kindergarten

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.

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 day¹.

Why is active play so important?

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, and
- developing emotional skills.

Toddlers

Simple, free, outdoor activity is ideal for toddlers as they are still developing the basic skills required for play. They enjoy rolling, crawling, standing and exploring new challenges.

Play materials such as large soft beach balls, buckets and spades, and cardboard boxes encourage imagination and provide opportunities for learning and fun. Music and action songs such as the 'Hokey Pokey' are a great way to encourage movement and play.

Preschoolers

At preschool age, children are developing quickly and showing an interest in the world around them. They want to touch, taste, smell, hear, and test things for themselves. They are keen to learn, are gaining more independence, and tend to need less help from their parents to explore their surroundings. Preschoolers learn a lot from their experiences and from their play environment.

Kindergarten children

At kindergarten age, children should thrive on walking, jumping, running and exploring. Children at this age begin to display a variety of styles of play, including copying others, creative play and making up their own games or activities. They enjoy movements such as climbing, pushing, pulling, spinning and dancing. Try to provide simple, safe toys or props such as large wooden blocks, dress up materials and balls for outdoor play.

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An ACT Government initiative developed in partnership with Heart Foundation ACT

Active play at different ages

Toddlers

Active play ideas for toddlers include:

- Streamer fun: provide the child with crepe paper to twirl and run around with.
- Action songs: lead actions to songs like 'Ring-a-ring-a-rosie' and 'I'm a little teapot'.
- Catching games: use a blow up beach ball to practise catching.
- Follow the leader games: lead a group of children in a line copying your actions.
- Obstacle courses: set up an indoor or outdoor obstacle course using furniture, boxes and sheets.
- Jumping games: use a rope on the ground as a river and the child has to jump over it.
- Ball games: use a soft ball to practise kicking and throwing.
- Hitting games: put a tennis ball in an old pair of tights and tie it from the clothesline or somewhere similar. Encourage the child to hit it with their hand before moving on to a suitable racquet for their age.
- Musical games: put on music and encourage the child to run. When the music stops, call out "stop" and then keep repeating this process.
- Playground games: make use of the equipment at your local playground or in your own backyard. Children should always be supervised while on the equipment.

Preschoolers

Active play ideas for preschool age children include:

- Potato sack races: place the child in a potato sack or old pillow case and encourage them to bounce and collect items at a distance (first set out by you) and to then return to where they started from.
- Bucket balls: place a bucket or empty container about one metre from the child and ask them to throw underarm and attempt to land the ball in the bucket. When they are successful you can move the bucket further away.
- Dodge ball: set out an area and ask the child to run from a chosen 'point A' to a 'point B'. Using a soft ball, roll the ball and attempt to contact the child with the ball below the knees. If you are with a group of children, use cones to mark out a circle and get the children to move into the middle of the circle, and roll the ball. When the ball makes contact with a child (below the knee), that child then moves to the outside of the circle and can take a turn at rolling the ball, attempting to target the other children below the knees.
- Kicking goals: using goalposts or markers set up a goal and have the child try to score a goal while you act as the goalie.

Kindergarten children

Active play ideas for kindergarten age children include:

- Musical chairs: place chairs in a circle, with one less chair than the number of children participating. With music playing in the background, the children need to dance around the chairs until the music stops. Once the music stops they are to sit down on a chair. The child that misses out on getting a chair can be given the job of turning the music off and judging.
- Crazy golf: using items from your home (e.g. blocks, containers, tunnels made out of cardboard boxes), create a simple indoor golf course, with as many holes as you like. Provide the child/ren with a cardboard tube (as a golf stick) and a tennis ball (as the golf ball). Show the child/ren how to guide the ball around the course and get them to see how many hits it takes to get the ball in the hole.

For more activity ideas please visit
www.kidsatplay.act.gov.au

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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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