

Active Play Every Day



3-6
YEARS



An introduction
to Active Play
Guidelines
for **3-6 year**
old children

This leaflet has been developed to help parents and carers support the healthy development of their child through active play.



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive

Active Play Every Day



Introduction

All forms of play are really important for young children, however active play is the most appropriate form of physical activity.

Being physically active early lays the foundation for good health, learning, communication and confidence as children grow.

As your child grows opportunities to be active through play, both with you and independently (on their own or with other children), helps with their physical development and encourages learning ability.

Active Play ideas for all

There are many ways to help your child develop through active play. For more active play ideas you can download activity sheets from **www.getirelandactive.ie**



Active Play for young children

Active play describes most forms of physical activity that young children can do including:

- **Everyday tasks:** climbing steps, helping tidy up, gardening or unpacking the shopping.
- **Unstructured activity:** dancing to music, chasing or climbing.
- **Structured activity:** specific games such as kicking a ball, hide and seek or games played in pre-school, organised games or sports.
- **Active travel:** walking, pedalling or using a scooter to get from place to place.

Daily unrestricted active play is important to help young children:

- Develop their senses.
- Develop good strength, balance and posture.
- Learn about how their bodies work.
- Build social and emotional bonds.

Physically active play also helps them:

- Develop essential movement skills.
- Develop strong bones.
- Maintain a healthy body weight.



Tips for safe Active Play

Physically active children should be in a safe environment and supervised at all times:

- Check that equipment is suitable (not too big, small, heavy or high) for your child's age and ability.
- Teach your child how to climb up and down before you let them climb independently.
- Encourage new activities and allow your child to adapt activities to suit their own play - let them discover their own limitations.
- Ensure they take drinks regularly when playing, particularly when it is hot.
- Keep active play free from stress - having fun is important for both of you.
- Encourage and praise them for all their efforts.



Children's attention spans differ and they may get tired of an activity or game quite quickly.

Don't extend any activity to the stage where one or both of you stop enjoying it.

TIP
Always stop
if they ask

How much?



All children aged over 3, who are capable of walking unaided, should be physically active every day for at least 3 hours (180 minutes) spread throughout the day.

Of this at least 1 hour (60 minutes) should consist of structured activity such as going swimming or playing a game of chase. It does not all need to take place at the one time, short sessions of 10-15 minutes can be built up over the day.

- Children, who are not capable of walking unaided, should be as active as possible every day. It is important that the amount of time your child is not active (*sedentary*) is limited to no more than an hour at a time except when they are sleeping. This includes time spent awake in car seats and buggies.
- Screen time (*TV, computers, video and others*) is recommended to be no more than 1 hour per day.
- Children need daily opportunities to play outdoors as well as indoors.
- Children need daily opportunities to develop a wide range of movement skills.

TIP

Make sure your child gets about 11-12 hours sleep in every 24 hours.



Active Play tips and ideas

3-4
YEARS

All games and suggestions are for both girls and boys.

- It is normal for young children to like to play alone and they may not co-operate or share well.
- Give them opportunities to play with other children such as play-dates.
- Use phrases such as **'stop', 'start', 'your turn next'** in games, and use actions to show what these mean.

Play ball

Show your child how to bounce and catch a ball, throw a ball up and catch it. Use balloons or balls of different weights and textures. Over time, move to aiming and throwing the ball at objects (*such as Skittles*) or into spaces (*such as a Hula Hoop*).

Kick a ball back and forth between you. Over time, move to kicking the ball against a wall and then aiming at specific spaces (*such as between two cones*).

Do the boogie woogie

Children love to move to music and dance can be a great energy burners as well as a fantastic way to allow children express themselves.

Choose some music with a clear beat and fairly fast pace. Start by clapping to the beat together. Now encourage your child (*by doing the actions yourself*) to:

- march on the spot
- move forward and backward
- move around in a circle
- squat down and stand up again
- kick one leg at a time
- take small two footed jumps
- wiggle hips and shake bum
- stretch up, out and down.

TIP
Rhythm and
actions will
improve with
practice.

Active Play tips and ideas

4-5
YEARS

All games and suggestions are for both girls and boys.

- They become more interested in group play and will want you to be involved or be attentive.
- Their understanding of number and space concepts increases so add counting and words that describe size in regular games and walks.

As If

You can play this with one child or a group of children by calling out the actions for them to act out for about 30 seconds.

- Jog in place **as if** a scary bear is running after you.
- Jump in place **as if** you are popcorn popping.
- March in place **as if** you are playing the drums in a marching band.
- Reach up **as if** you are catching bubbles in the air.
- Swim **as if** you are in a giant pool of jelly.
- Walk **as if** you are walking through a giant sticky toffee pudding.
- Shake your body **as if** you are a wet dog.

Batting

Use a bat (*make a simple one by rolling up a newspaper, or use a tennis racquet, hurley or golf club*) to practice hitting a ball. Try the following games:

- Box golf – place a box on the ground about 3 meters away with the open end facing your child. Encourage them to hit the ball into the box.
- Top off – place a ball on top of a traffic cone or large plastic bottle. Encourage them to knock the ball off its perch with the bat.
- Baseball – stand in front of your child (*out of reach of the bat*) and gently throw the ball in their direction. Encourage them to swing the bat and hit the ball.

Active Play tips and ideas

5-6
YEARS

All games and suggestions are for both girls and boys.

- They understand 'rules' or 'aims' of games better, but it is important to continue to show through actions rather than words.
- Use games with as few 'rules' as possible.
- Encourage co-operation and participation rather than competition.
- They generally seek the company of other children to play with, friends become important.
- Obstacle courses, walking on cracks in the footpath, skipping with a rope and riding a bike all help with their movement skills.

What time is it Mr. Wolf?

One child is Mr. Wolf - who stands at one end of the playing area with their back to the others (*the sheep*) who stand in a line at the other end of the playing area.

- The sheep call out 'What time is it Mr. Wolf?'
- Mr. Wolf turns to face them and shouts a time (*such as 2 o'clock*).
- The sheep then take the same number of steps as the time (*such as 2 steps*).
- Mr. Wolf turns his back to the sheep again for them to call out again.
- When the sheep get close enough to be caught, Mr. Wolf shouts 'Time for dinner' and chases the sheep who try to get back to the den (*the start line*).
- If a sheep gets caught, they become Mr. Wolf.



Basic Movement Skills

Children learn more physical skills in their first six years than at any other point in their lives.

These are called the basic or fundamental movement skills and are the building blocks for lifelong activity.

The sequence in which children learn these skills is similar. While there can be gender differences in some activities, for example boys tend to develop the overarm throwing skill quicker than girls, both girls and boys need to be given opportunities to develop all skills.

MOVEMENT SKILLS

Walking
Running
Jumping
(for distance, for height, one leg to another)
Hopping
Leaping
Skipping
Swinging
Side stepping
Dodging
Galloping
Climbing
Crawling

BODY CONTROL SKILLS

Balancing on one foot
Walking on a line or a beam
Climbing
Rolling
(forward roll, log roll)
Twisting
Turning
Rotating
Landing
Stopping
Bending
Stretching

OBJECT CONTROL SKILLS

Catching
Overhand throw
Underhand throw
Punt kicking
(kicking ball from hands)
Striking with an implement
Two handed striking
Hand dribbling
(repeatedly bouncing a ball with one hand)
Foot dribbling
Kicking
Chest passing

Developing basic movement skills is as important for your child's ability to do every day tasks now and as they get older, as it is for their performance in sport.

Child development

For information about your child's development visit www.hse.ie/caringforyourbaby.

Your Public Health Nurse may also give you copies of the booklets ***Caring for Your Child 2-6 years***.

If you are concerned about your child's development speak with your GP or Public Health Nurse.

If your child has a disability speak with their healthcare team about specific equipment and activities needed to help them keep active.

All children will benefit from physical activity and active play regardless of their level of ability.



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For more active play ideas for all ages visit www.getirelandactive.ie