

Doing Physical Activity Together

Advice for families about the social, developmental, physical, mood and brain gains of being active together, and some ideas to try.



Authors: Kate Freire, Rod Pope, Kristen Andrews
With advice from children, parents and others



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Acknowledgement of Country

We pay our respects to all First Nations Elders past, present, and emerging. We recognise the Wiradjuri people of Australia, who are the Traditional Custodians of the Land on which this resource was made.

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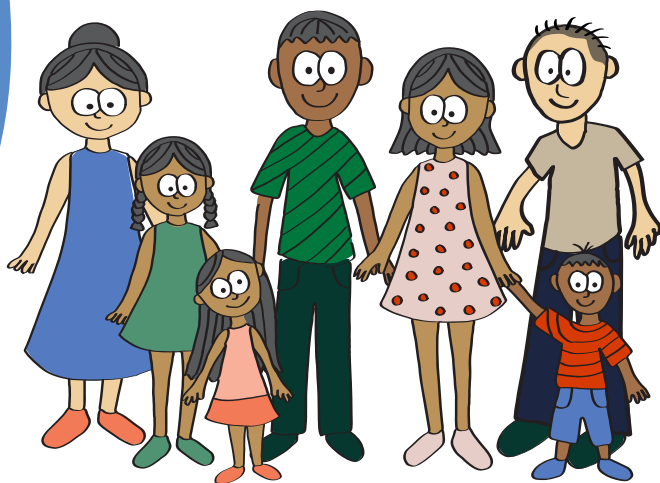
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Families tell us that being active together is important because you spend time together while doing something fun and healthy.



There are many other reasons too.



This resource is based on the experiences and knowledge of primary-school aged children, their parents, researchers, and health professionals.

There are some hard words in this resource. They are written in **orange**. They are explained on the last page.

Sharing active times together helps relationships

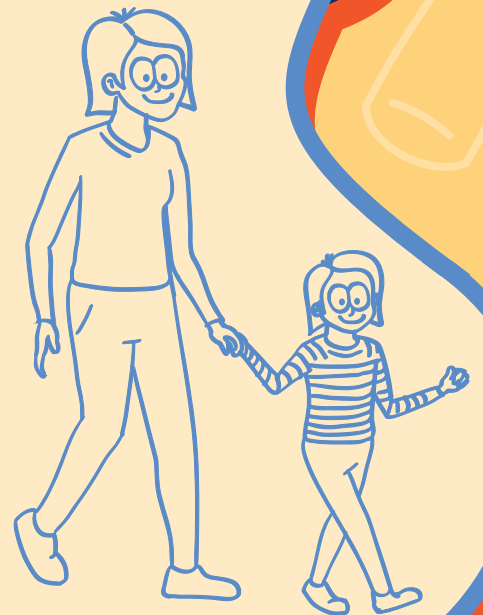


Families tell us

- Doing physical activity together can build child-parent and family relationships because it provides chances to spend time together.
- Everyday activities, such as walking to and from school, are times to catch up with each other and a fun way to find out about each other's days.
- But it is more than a chance to talk. Sharing active times together helps you connect to each other.

Children tell us

- Children are often focused on fun when active with their parent.
- They told us they feel big emotions during this time too. Children told us that when being active together their parent is sending them the silent message they are cared for and loved.
- Children also told us being active together is a chance to be heard because their parents are more relaxed and better at listening.





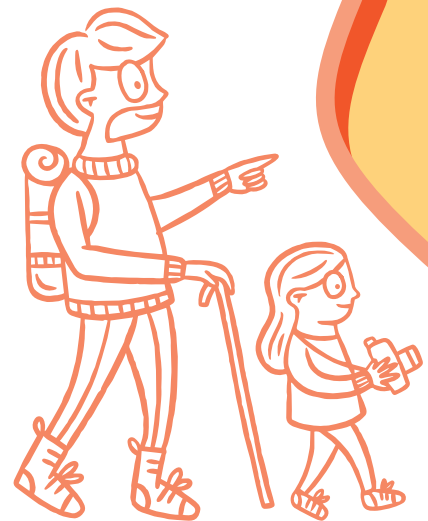
Parents tell us

- Parents told us it is a good time to talk because they find it easier to be fully focused on their child without distractions.
- They suggested turning off phones, or leaving them behind, to help everyone focus on the activity and each other.



You might like to try

- Walking/ biking/ riding scooters to or from the school (bus stop) together.
- Walking around the block after dinner and taking it in turns to tell each other about your day or week.
- Planning and doing a special activity together at a weekend or during a holiday.



Being active together supports child development

Research tells us

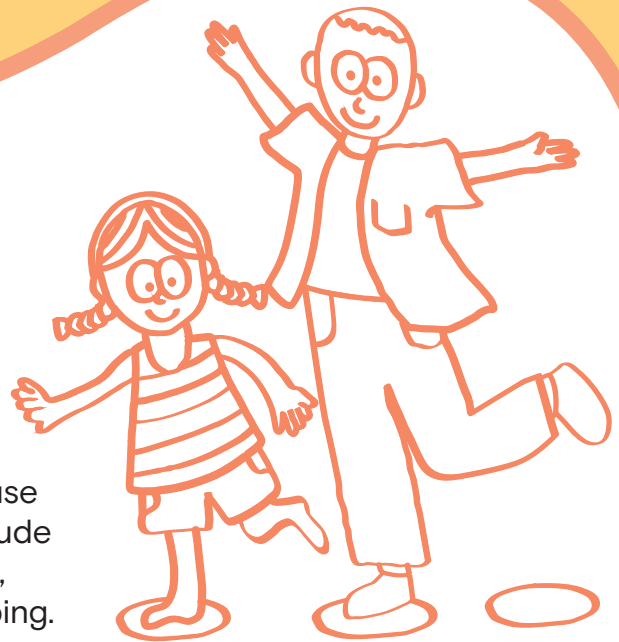
- When children feel loved and supported, they can focus on gaining new skills.
- Learning new skills takes practice, often over many weeks and sometimes much longer.
- In a child's early years, repeated opportunities to be active help a child's brain to develop strong patterns for how to move.



- Practicing in a safe and supportive environment gives children a chance to try different ways of moving, and to figure out what works best.
- Sport and exercise helps our body by training **agility**, strength, and **reaction times**.
- But to play sport or even take part in playground activities children must also gain other skills.
- These skills include problem-solving, social skills, communication, and concentration.
- These skills are useful in many other areas of life, as well as when being active.

You might like to try

- Make an obstacle course in your backyard and take it in turns to lead.
- Follow-the-leader around the house or playground. See if you can include any of these movements: hopping, skipping, galloping sideways, jumping.
- **Children:** Can you think of an activity you find hard or makes you frustrated? Can you and your parent think of fun ways to help you both practice that activity? Some things you could try might include:
 - Adding short but regular times to practice the activity onto the beginning or end of another activity.
 - Finding a way to make that activity easier. For example, get closer if it is a catching or throwing activity. Or use a foam ball or a bigger ball.
- **Parent:** Can you think of an activity your child does that you find hard or don't know much about? Could you ask your child to teach and help you to find some fun ways to practice it with them? This may provide you with opportunities to model learning from mistakes. Children often enjoy the chance to be the teacher.



Practising sporting skills



Children tell us

- Children enjoy practising their sporting skills with their parents in a safe and supportive space.
- Practising together gives children a chance to test out their skills, and it does not matter if they make a mistake as their parent is there to help and encourage them.
- They like their parents encouraging them with their practice and seeing them improve.

Parents tell us

- Some children do not like practising their sporting skills. This may be because they do not like the activity or they do not know why it would help. Finding times for short, fun practice sessions with you may help them see how gaining skills through practice can be fun.
- Practice can be frustrating for both children and parents. But creating a calm and accepting environment where children can make mistakes and learn is important. Make a plan with your child on how to manage big emotions (see planning resource).





Research tells us

- It can take many practice times to gain better skills. Short and regular practice times work better than long practices.
- Children may need help to tell you how they got better in a practice session. They may focus just on their skills and you may need to remind them there are lots of ways they can make progress. For example, increasing their focus or encouraging themselves better.

You might like to try

- Catching and throwing practice.
- Playing games in the backyard.
- Developing everyday times or routines to fit in some practice. Can you add a short practice to the beginning, middle or end of an activity?



Some families compete and measure against each other

Families tell us

- In some families, competing can be a part of being active together. However, families have told us it is not a real competition because of the differences in size and skills of the competitors. Competing together as a family is about playing and learning to compete.
- Many parents use competition to give children experiences of winning and losing. Sometimes, children are aware this is happening, but most still report they enjoy the experience.



- We all know that winning is fun. But you can play well and not win.
- **It's OK to lose sometimes because no-one wins all the time.**

Families tell us



- Not all families compete. Usually this is because someone (child or parent) is not competitive and does not enjoy it. If your family has a mixture of competitive and non-competitive people, find ways of encouraging each other that suit everyone.
- Simple technology, such as a stopwatch, can help motivate competitive people by allowing them to compete with themselves rather than their physical activity partner.
- The non-competitive partner may want to join in by encouraging their partner and keeping score or time.

Families tell us



- In some families children (and parents) may compare themselves to the rest of their family during physical activity.
- Comparisons such as this are a normal part of growing up, gaining greater skills and strength, and parents getting older!
- Even when you don't win, are you able to score more or jump higher when playing with your physical activity partner? If you are, then you are getting better.

You might like to try

- Asking yourself and your physical activity partner if you like competing and if you want to plan activities that include some friendly competition.
- Relay races.
- Competing against yourself can still be fun and your activity partner may enjoy cheering you on and helping to keep score. Stop watches (on phones) can be one way to compete against yourself.



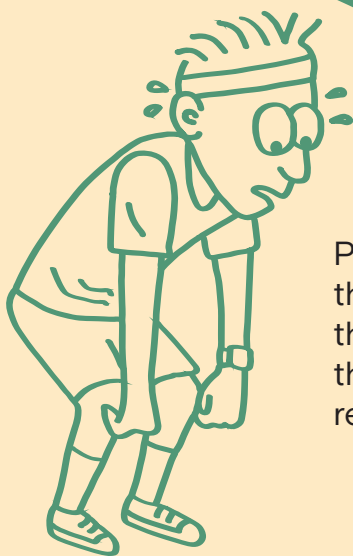
Parents use it to support and care for their children

Parents tell us

They do physical activity with their child as a way of providing support to their children. Physical activity together allows them to:



- relate with their child
- teach their child how to work with other people
- build **resilience**
- role-model healthy behaviours and fun
- show children how to incorporate physical activity into their lives
- help their child's practice of physical and sporting skills
- teach their child physical activity is a valuable activity to participate in
- teach their children a healthy way to use extra energy.



Parents have told us they try to be active with their child even though they might not exercise regularly on their own.

Parents tell us

They also told us that sometimes doing physical activity with their children can be hard. Below are two ways parents manage their expectations and enjoyment when doing physical activity with their child.

- Try shifting your focus away from the physical enjoyment of the activity to focus upon the benefits it provides you in your relationship with your child. You might think of it as a time to hear what is going on in your child's life and share time together.
- You could plan your physical activity session together and try to include some time that everyone can gain enjoyment from the physical aspects. This may include performing different types of physical activity together, for example, one person running and the other cycling. Or each person doing a little bit (an interval) on their own, at their own pace, before re-grouping again.



Research tells us

Providing your child with equipment and toys that help them to be active is important, such as balls, bats, and bikes.



It is a healthy way to spend time together

Regular physical activity is good for you in many ways.



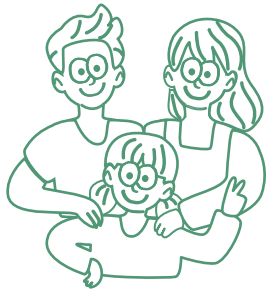
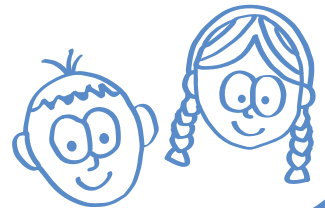
Physical gains include



- promotes healthy growth and development
- helps build strong bones and muscles
- keeps you moving and uses up extra energy
- reduces your chance of getting sick
- helps manage health conditions like heart and lung conditions, diabetes, and cancer.

Mood gains include

- makes you feel good
- helps you **relax**
- improves **self-esteem** and **confidence**
- makes you less worried and gloomy.



Social gains include

- provides families with opportunities to have fun together.

Brain gains include

- helps you remember things better
- helps you solve problems and plan clearly
- helps you think before you act and helps you focus.



Hard Words

Agility: skill to move fast and change direction.

Confidence: feeling sure about yourself and your skills.

Relax: to become calm in your body and head.

Reaction times: time taken to act. Like when a ball is thrown, the time taken to see and move to catch it.

Resilience: not giving up when things get hard. Seeing good things even when times are hard. Skill in bouncing back when something hard has happened.

Self-esteem: how you feel about yourself and how you think about what you can do.

Remember

Being active, even for a short time, is better than nothing.

Doing activity together is a partnership. It is important everyone has a voice and is happy with the activity that is planned.





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