

# Move Well Eat Well



## Move Play and Go Background paper

In consultation with their expert advisory panel, this background paper has been developed by researchers at The Royal Children's Hospital, Murdoch Children's Research Institute, and the Centre of Physical Activity Across the Lifespan at the Australian Catholic University. It was commissioned by the Victorian Kids-'Go for your life' project.

*Move Well Eat Well* recommends all children aged 5 to 12 years need to Move, Play and Go". In order to lay the foundations for an active and healthy lifestyle, children need to engage in active play everyday, with a significant emphasis on outdoor play and reducing sedentary behaviour.

### Active play everyday

Active play is an approach to physical activity. It involves actively moving with regular bursts of a moderate to vigorous pace<sup>1</sup>. Active play can occur indoors and outdoors, alone, or with friends and family. The freedom and possibilities offered by outdoor active play best promotes the benefits listed below.

### Benefits of active play

Active play is important for a child's overall health and development, even before a baby can walk or talk. Making time for active play everyday helps to:

- maintain a healthy weight and protect against diseases later in life<sup>2</sup>
- improve cardiovascular and musculoskeletal health<sup>3,4</sup>
- develop lifelong language and movement skills essential for everyday living<sup>5,6</sup>
- develop social competencies such as sharing, negotiating, working in groups, leading and resolving conflicts
- improve concentration, memory and classroom behaviour<sup>7</sup>
- increase opportunities for development of emotional intelligence<sup>8</sup> (e.g. empathy, flexibility, decision making, self-awareness and self-confidence).

# Move Well Eat Well

Daily opportunities for active play contribute to optimal child development in all children. Not only does play provide the foundations to develop lifelong physical activity behaviours, it initiates the development of the skills, the knowledge and the attitudes that lead to active and healthy lifestyles<sup>9</sup>.

## **A time for play, everyday!**

Guidelines often quantify the amount of physical activity, which encompasses active play, children should undertake. These guidelines also outline the limitations for sedentary behaviour. Australia's recommendations for physical activity in children aged 5-12 years are:

- Children need at least 60 minutes (and up to several hours) of moderate to vigorous physical activity every day<sup>10</sup>
- Children should not spend more than two hours each day using electronic media for entertainment (e.g. computer games, television, internet), particularly during daylight hours

## **Different types of active play**

Structured and unstructured active play refers to the different types of children's play.

Structured active play is usually organised or planned and often follows a set sequence of events or actions. It often has set rules, time limits, leaders/instructors, and special equipment. Examples include infant movement classes, swimming lessons, or modified sports for primary school children.

Unstructured active play is less restricted and often "spontaneous". Unstructured active play can be highly imaginative, creative and undirectional. It can include playing alone or with friends and family, going for a walk, dancing to music at home, or playing in the park.

Structured active play provides many physical and social benefits<sup>12</sup>, however unstructured active play, especially outdoor play, remains the most convenient, cost effective, and developmentally appropriate type of play for children 0 to 12 years.

## **An important experience for every child**

# Move Well Eat Well

Active play is recognised as a universal right for every child and is still the most developmentally appropriate means of physical activity for all children. No discrepancies should exist between genders, with boys and girls being given equal opportunities to engage in play<sup>13</sup>.

Boys and girls may prefer different types of play, but opportunities to experience a variety of activities in a positive and stimulating environment, should still be a significant part of childhood.

Infants and children are naturally drawn to gross motor play which is an important component of early brain development and learning. Children learn by doing and by being actively involved in their own learning. Outdoor play in particular, stimulates children to understand how their body works in relation to the demands of different activities and a range of different environments. The outdoor environment provides infinite opportunities to use large muscle groups in many ways over and over again, and experience the joys of movement, creativity and friendship.

Active play enables children to develop the balance, strength and coordination needed for everyday tasks. Regular movement and play challenges children, stretching their abilities and imagination<sup>14</sup>. Competencies developed through play enable children to feel good about themselves and provide the confidence to look forward to future opportunities and activities.

Not only does active play allow a child of any age to learn about what they are capable of doing, they also learn to engage with others, lead, follow and learn self-advocacy<sup>6</sup>. Active play encourages children to develop respect for others and gives them an understanding of socially appropriate norms and expectations<sup>15</sup>. Play offers a wide range of opportunities for social interaction that influence the development of social competencies and relationships which occur at present and in the future.

## **Developmentally appropriate play**

Developmentally appropriate play occurs when the play opportunities offered to a child match the social, mental and physical capacities of that child. Developmentally appropriate play should also take into account previous experiences. For example, a child from a different culture may be confident in kicking a round ball, but an oval shaped ball may at first challenge these feelings of competence. Therefore, age may not always be the best indicator of developmentally appropriate play.

# Move Well Eat Well

Matching the movement capacities of children is a positive action that encourages children to enjoy activities<sup>16</sup>. Developmentally appropriate play ideally promotes enough enjoyment for children to want to keep improving their skills alone or with others. For example, it is appropriate to encourage young children to catch using a slow moving, large, soft ball rather than a fast moving, small, hard ball.

Generally, it is developmentally appropriate to teach the rules of junior sport such as Netta, Netball or Kanga Cricket to children in the middle years of primary school. At this stage of development, most children have acquired the cognitive skills of understanding the consequences of rules, the social skills of working in a group, and the mastery of physical skills such as throwing and catching.

## **Risky business**

Safety is seen as a key factor when selecting outdoor play spaces for young children. Every parent wants to keep their child safe, however taking 'risks' and experiencing new outdoor play spaces is essential to their learning and development. Safety concerns about injury from active play may persuade parents and carers to permit excessive indoor sedentary behaviour and limit outdoor play experiences. Children need to also be provided with play environments that extend beyond the home or traditional playground. Additional outdoor places such as the beach, large scrub areas, fallen trees, rivers, or even overgrown backyards all hold valuable play opportunities for families to explore and experience together.

With active play comes discovery, exploration, friendships, imagination, challenges and sometimes, risk. There is no such thing as a risk-free play space. Active play involves coming to terms with, and mastering, new experiences<sup>15</sup>. Through play, fear becomes a source of enjoyment rather than distress<sup>17</sup>.

In some families the perceptions of risks and an over exaggerated need for close supervision, can prevent children from enjoying and maximising play experiences<sup>18</sup>. Parents' understanding of the risks associated with play may not in fact match the reality of these risks. Coming to terms with risks in play involves re-thinking the value of active play, and understanding that greater health risks are in fact associated with sedentary behaviour rather than being active.



# Move Well Eat Well

Children, in schools have a right to time and space for child-centred play. Above all, parents and carers need to accept that active play is a natural and healthy means for children to “explore, take risks, make mistakes, seek out adventure and test boundaries”<sup>19</sup>.

## References

- <sup>1</sup> Baquet G, Stratton G, Van Praagh E, Berthoin S. Improving physical activity assessment in prepubertal children with high-frequency accelerometry monitoring: a methodological issue. *Preventive Medicine*. 2007; 44(2):143-7.
- <sup>2</sup> Trost S, Kerr L, Ward D, Pate R. Physical activity and determinants of physical activity in obese and non-obese children. *International Journal of Obesity*. 2001; 25(6):822-829.
- <sup>3</sup> Andersen LB, Harro M, Sardinha LB, Froberg K, Ekelund U, Brage S, et al. Physical activity and clustered cardiovascular risk in children: a cross-sectional study (The European Youth Heart Study) *Lancet*. 2006; 368(9532):299-304.
- <sup>4</sup> McKay HA, MacLean L, Petit M, MacKelvie-O'Brien K, Janssen P, Beck T, et al. "Bounce at the Bell": a novel program of short bouts of exercise improves proximal femur bone mass in early pubertal children. *British Journal of Sports Medicine*. 2005;39(8):521-6.
- <sup>5</sup> Burdette HL, Whitaker RC. Resurrecting free play in young children: looking beyond fitness and fatness to attention, affiliation, and affect. *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*. 2005;159(1):46-50.
- <sup>6</sup> Ginsburg KR, American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family: The importance of play in promoting healthy child development and maintaining strong parent-child bonds. *Pediatrics*. 2007;119(1):182-91.
- <sup>7</sup> Strong WB, Malina RM, Blimkie CJ, Daniels SR, Dishman RK, Gutin B, et al. Evidence based physical activity for school-age youth. *Journal of Pediatrics*. 2005;146(6):732-7.
- <sup>8</sup> Pellegrini AD, Smith PK. Physical activity play: the nature and function of a neglected aspect of playing. *Child Development*. 1998;69(3):577-98.
- <sup>9</sup> NASPE. *Appropriate Practices in Movement Programmes for Young Children ages 3-5*. Reston, VA:AAHPERD, 2000. Available from: Jess M et al. *Physical Activity and Basic Movement Development in Early Childhood: A Review of Literature*
- <sup>10</sup> Australian Government, Department of Health and Ageing, *Australia's Physical Activity Recommendations for 5-12 year olds*, Commonwealth of Australia, 2004.
- <sup>11</sup> NASPE. *Physical Activity Guidelines for Infants and Toddlers*. [cited 2006 Nov 17]; Available from: <http://www.aahperd.org/naspe/template.cfm?template=toddlers.html>



# Move Well Eat Well

<sup>12</sup> American Academy of Pediatrics. Organized Sports for Children and Preadolescents: Policy Statement. *Pediatrics*. 2001;107(6):1459-62.

<sup>13</sup> Trost SG, Pate RR, Dowda M, Saunders R, Ward DS, Felton G. Gender differences in physical activity and determinants of physical activity in rural fifth grade children. *Journal of School Health*. 1996;66(4):145-50.

<sup>14</sup> Rodger S, Ziviani J. *Occupational Therapy with Children: Understanding Children's Occupations and Enabling Participation*. Australia: Blackwell Publishing. 2006

<sup>15</sup> Best Play. What play provisions should do for children. National Playing Fields Association. March 2000.

<sup>16</sup> Gallahue DL, Ozman JC. *Understanding Motor Development: Infants, Children, Adolescents, Adults*. 5th ed. New York: McGraw-Hill. 2002.

<sup>17</sup> Abrams. *The Playful Self*. Fourth Estate Limited. 1997. Available from: Best Play. What play provisions should do for children. National Playing Fields Association. March 2000.

<sup>18</sup> Morrongiello BA, House K. Measuring parent attributes and supervision behaviors relevant to child injury risk: examining the usefulness of questionnaire measures. *Injury Prevention*. 2004;10(2):114-8.

<sup>19</sup> Gill T. *Rethinking Childhood*. [homepage on the internet] no date [cited 2007 October ]; Available from: <http://www.rethinkingchildhood.com/>



Produced for Kids – 'Go for your life' by 'Filling the Gaps', The Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne, Murdoch Children's Research Institute, Centre of Physical Activity Across the Lifespan and Australian Catholic University.

Reviewed: 2008