Encouraging outdoor activity

To make the most of the many benefits gained through spending time outdoors, children and adolescents need to be proactively encouraged to get outside.

Many of the benefits of outdoor activity evolve as children get older, as they become more able to access different environments and be more independent.

The outdoor places where children and adolescents spend time need to be designed to make it easy to be active and for everybody to move about safely within their local neighbourhood.

Enabling children and adolescents to walk or cycle to local parks and community places can help form patterns of physical activity and provide opportunities for older children to develop independence and confidence.

Be a good role model to your children and get active with them.

Where to find more information

You don’t have to travel far to be active outdoors.

Walk or ride to school at least one day per week and encourage your friends to join in.

Book into an active school holiday program or camp run by the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries (www.dsr.wa.gov.au/camps/holiday-camps).

Contact your local government or visit their website to find a park you haven’t visited before or your nearest walk or cycling trail.

Visit the Trails WA website (www.trailswa.com.au) and find trails to explore in local bushland.

Visit the NaturePlayWA website (www.natureplaywa.org.au) to find useful resources designed to encourage and inspire outdoor play.

Contact your local government or visit their website to find a park you haven’t visited before or your nearest walk or cycling trail.

For more information or to obtain copies of other publications contact:

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How active are Australian children and adolescents?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Recommended physical activity guidelines for each age group.</th>
<th>What percentage of children in each age group meet the recommended guidelines?</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2-4 years</td>
<td>At least three hours per day of physical activity; with at least one hour of energetic play.</td>
<td>72% of young children are active enough each day</td>
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<tr>
<td>5-12 years</td>
<td>At least one hour per day of moderate to vigorous physical activity.</td>
<td>Only 19% (less than 1 in 5) of primary school aged children meet recommended activity guidelines</td>
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<tr>
<td>13-17 years</td>
<td>At least one hour per day of moderate to vigorous physical activity.</td>
<td>Only 8% (less than 1 in 10) of adolescents are active for at least one hour per day</td>
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Benefits for children and adolescents of being active outdoors

Physical activity occurs in many places, both indoors and out: at home, at school and in community recreation centres; at sports fields, parks and play spaces; at the beach, along the river and in our forests.

Being active outdoors offers immense physical and mental benefits from early childhood development through to adolescence and into our adult lives.

**Increasing physical activity and fitness**

Children who spend more time outdoors tend to have better levels of fitness, and improved muscle, bone, joint, heart and lung health. Research has also linked time spent outdoors with decreased likelihood of overweight and obesity in adolescence.

Outdoor play and activity habits learned while young are more likely to be maintained, decreasing the risk of chronic illness in later life.

**Fundamental movement skills**

Children who play in natural outdoor spaces have better physical ability, balance, and coordination. Activities such as running, climbing, balancing, and catching help develop important movement skills.

**Social skills**

Outdoor activity with friends and family can help to build social confidence and provides opportunities to improve cooperation, teamwork, leadership, and communication skills.

**Relieving anxiety, stress and depression**

Outdoor activity in natural environments can improve emotional wellbeing and reduce anxiety and depression. Children who are active outdoors are more likely to have better self-esteem and are less likely to be socially isolated.

**Child development and learning**

Outdoor activity can assist academic development through improving attention, focus and concentration in the classroom. Time spent in natural outdoor places encourages problem solving, lateral thinking, leadership, and a curious and creative imagination.

**Resilience and risk management**

Through outdoor activity, children learn to identify and manage risks. Lack of exposure to risk in childhood can hamper development of resilience, self-confidence, independence, and judgement skills. Lack of challenging activities can foster frustration, leading to unwanted risk-taking behaviours.

The number of children who walk to school or the local park or shops is also declining.

63% 5-10-year-old children

50% Adolescents

are driven to school

“Gone are the days when most children roam freely in the suburbs, play ball on the street, and populate parks after school; deserted neighbourhoods are more the norm in many of today's modern westernised cities”.

Benefits for different age groups

**Pre-school (0-4 years old):**

Unstructured outdoor play can assist children to understand and express emotions, and develop flexibility, self-confidence, and self-awareness. Empathy and sharing with others are traits learned in early childhood through social experiences.

Outdoor play is an important arena for the development of language, comprehension and vocabulary, and the practice of social skills; particularly cooperation and problem solving.

**Primary years (5-12 years old):**

Development of physical activity and motor skills in childhood decreases the risk of injuries as children get older.

Independent activity for primary school children in outdoor environments can lead to improved self-belief and self-awareness.

**Adolescents (13-17 years old):**

Going to public places such as parks and outdoor spaces away from home and the school environment enables adolescents to learn to navigate their neighbourhood and become independently mobile.

Going to places outside of home and school is important for social interaction and development of personal identity and social support networks. Places that foster a sense of belonging, and encourage participation in adventurous and challenging outdoor experiences, are often sought by young people.