

Pass
Along to
Parents

Best Practices for Physical Activities

Children three years old and over are encouraged to engage in moderate to vigorous physical activity (MVPA) daily. Moderate levels of physical activity are at intensities faster than a slow walk, but still allow children to talk easily. Vigorous levels of physical activity are at intensities like a fast walk, jog or run that get children “breathless” or breathing deeper and faster than during typical activities. Children who are “breathless” are exercising their heart and lungs along with the muscles in their arms and legs! They are getting stronger and burning calories, which allows their bodies to balance food intake with energy used to help them maintain a healthy body weight. Provided that children do not have health restrictions, being breathless during physical activity is healthful, safe and will not cause physical harm.

Encourage physical activity to be accumulated throughout the day for all children. Children are encouraged to accumulate the recommended time spent in daily physical activity by engaging in bouts of ten minutes or more of activity. These bouts of activity do not need to be continuous to provide the necessary health benefits. Intermittent bouts of activity are also beneficial and come in the form of bursts of some vigorous and moderate activity and brief rest periods.

Vary the levels of intensity based on the child’s fitness level. When participating in physical activity with children, watch them for signs of fatigue or frustration and be ready to change the activity to meet the needs of each individual child. Levels of intensity vary based on the physical fitness of the child. One child may only be slightly winded from running across the playground, while another child may be heavily winded from the same activity. If children are fatigued by physical activity, it is important to support and encourage them to have fun; re-direct them to a less intense or modified activity or help them finish the activity if appropriate.

Variety is important. When participating in physical activity with children, be sure to include a variety of age appropriate activities. Encourage preschool and school-age children to work together to adapt or invent games and activities with you. This will serve to keep their interest

by preventing boredom and monotony of doing the same activity day in and day out. In addition, engaging in a variety of activities provides children with numerous opportunities to work different muscles.

Provide opportunities for adult-led and child-led physical activity. Physical activity can be adult or child led; both are important. Adult-led (structured) physical activity tends to get children active at higher levels of intensity, whereas, child-led (unstructured) physical activity allows children to explore their environments, be creative, and use their imaginations.

Don’t forget about the infants. They can also be physically active. It is important for infants to have the opportunity to explore their environments, build strength and increase body awareness through tummy time. Supervised free play on their tummies in open and safe places encourages infants to explore, touch and feel the world around them.

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