

Active Play, Every Day



A Guide for Those Visiting Parents of Children Ages 1-3 Years in the Home



NATIONAL CENTER ON
Early Childhood Health and Wellness

School readiness begins with health!

This guide serves as a companion piece to the Active Play, Every Day video. The video is meant to support home visitors—and anyone working with families with children ages 1-3 in their home—partner with parents and caregivers on healthy active living goals and active play. *The Active Play, Every Day* video has been purposefully developed in a style that will appeal to both children and adults, so if parents watch it while their children are present, it is appropriate for both audiences.

Key Messages to Share With Families

- Tummy time is exercise for your baby. But once babies can crawl and on into toddlerhood, they still need physical activity!
- Toddlers seem busy and active, but they still need dedicated time for physical activity. In fact, the recommendation is that they take part in active play for at least 60 minutes a day. This can be in short bursts throughout the day.
- Active play is physical activity such as crawling, jumping, or running. Young children need this type of play to grow and develop and to set the stage for a lifetime of physical activity.
- Active play also supports other learning as well—such as language development, early math skills (like spatial awareness and counting), and concepts like close/far and up/down.
- Finding time to help your child be active can be challenging. Busy work schedules, small living spaces, nap times, and even weather can pose challenges.
- But—a few minutes of active play at a time add up across the day!
- Active play, every day, helps children develop important physical skills. Active play also increases the chances that children:
 - Sleep better at night;
 - Maintain a healthy weight and
 - Build a strong relationship with their parents when they are involved in play

How to Use the Video

Anyone working with families with young children or visiting families in their home can use this video to help families become familiar with young children's need for active play, develop goals around active play, and try new parent-child active play ideas.

Help families become familiar with young children's need for active play.

- After discussing healthy active living with the family, check for understanding by playing the video and asking parents to share an idea or image that struck them or to share one new piece of information they learned.
- Ask parents what physical skills their child has mastered and which of the activities in the video were ones their child could do and would enjoy.
- Active play has many benefits in addition to supporting physical development. Research shows that active play supports healthy brain development—enhancing children's ability to sustain attention and other executive planning skills. Active play can also support social-emotional skills like communication, collaboration, safe risk-taking, and the development of empathy. (For more information, see *The Power of Play* from the American Academy of Pediatrics: <https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/142/3/e20182058>).





Develop goals around active play in partnership with the child/family.

- Use the video to begin a discussion about the family's goals for healthy active living and/or to articulate a goal the family would like to work toward regarding healthy active living.
- Use the video to start a discussion about active play ideas that feel doable to the family or that they would like to try.

Try new parent-child active play ideas.

- Use the video to provide ideas for indoor active play; try one or more of these activities on a home visit.
- After the video, explore how the family currently engages in active play. Are they satisfied with this level of activity? If not, what would they like to change or try?

Reinforce key messages from the home visit.

- If you discuss active healthy living on the home visit, you may wish to share the video (via a link in a text message or email) as a follow-up after the visit to reinforce those messages and your shared discussion.
- Home visitors can ask if parents have any questions about active play, if they have tried any of the active play ideas discussed on the visit, or if they saw an idea in the video that they would like to try with their child.
- Home visitors can also suggest using regular active play as a relationship-building strategy. They may point out that the shared enjoyment of both parent and child during these play activities can support the development of a stronger parent-child relationship.

A Note on Goal-Setting With Families

Finding time for at least 1 hour of active play per day may feel challenging for some families. As a home visitor, you can help them develop SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and timely) goals to move closer to this recommendation. Remind parents that they don't have to aim for a full hour at once—even 10 minutes at a time adds up! Validate for families that goals will change naturally based on season/ weather, their work schedule, or their child's age and stage.

Some sample active healthy living goals, that will help families increase the frequency of active play daily with their toddlers, may include:

- Take a 15 minute family walk, 3 times per week.
- In the summer, run through a sprinkler or go to a community pool 2 times per week.
- Encourage child to walk to the park (instead of riding in stroller) 2 times per week.
- Turn on music and have a dance party for 10 minutes while making dinner 2 times per week.
- Include child in a daily chore (example: helping to unload groceries, putting away laundry, pushing the vacuum) 3 times per week for 10 minutes.
- Reduce screen time by 20 minutes per day and replace with free play.

You can also brainstorm with families a variety of ways that they may provide toddlers with 60 minutes of physical activity per day. For example:

- Family yoga/stretching in the morning: 10 minutes
- Parking at the back of the parking lot for child-care drop-off/pick-up: 10 minutes of walking
- Have your toddler help you put groceries in the fridge and cabinets: 10 minutes of walking, lifting, carrying

- Let toddler blow bubbles and chase/pop them while you make dinner: 10 minutes
- Short family walk after dinner: 10 minutes
- Family yoga/stretching before bedtime: 10 minutes

Additional Active Play Ideas

The video presents ideas for active play with toddlers, including: heading to the playground, having a dance party, creating an indoor obstacle course, playing Simon Says, doing yoga/stretching, and including children in daily routines such as carrying groceries. Here are some additional active play ideas that you can share with families, in addition to your own suggestions:

- Go on a “pillow walk”: Make a path of pillows of all different shapes and sizes on the floor. Let your child walk, climb and crawl over this pillow-y path.
- Play “basket” ball: Place a laundry basket at the end of the room and let your child toss a soft foam ball or rolled up socks into the basket. You can also play indoor bowling by placing empty water or soda bottles in a line and letting your child roll a ball into them.
- Go outside with sidewalk chalk: This might not seem like exercise, but as children are squatting to draw, they are building strength, coordination and balance in their legs and trunk. They are also developing fine motor (finger) skills!
- It’s tunnel time. Get a moving box (large enough to fit your child). Open the box at each end to make a tunnel and encourage your child to crawl through. Your child can also roll cars or balls through and run to get them on the other side.
- Create an at-home balance “beam.” Make a line of masking tape or painter’s tape on the carpet or floor (about 5 feet long is perfect). Show children how to walk along the line, jump along the line, hop from one side to another, push a car along the line—the possibilities are endless.
- Play Popcorn! Lay an old sheet or shawl on the floor and have children (and grown-ups) hold each side. Toss some small foam balls or stuffed animals in the middle and...shake, shake, shake the sheet until the balls (or toys) pop off. Let the children chase them and bring them back again.



- Work movement into story-time: act out stories with your child. Pick a word and a movement, based on the story, and act it out (like the giant climbing the beanstalk from *Jack and the Beanstalk* or the monkeys jumping in *Five Little Monkeys*) when it happens in the story.

As a visitor to a family’s home, you have a unique window into their needs, challenges and interest in active play and healthy living. Talking with parents about their daily routines, observing their available space, and discussing their child’s temperament, interests and abilities will help you collaborate to identify active play ideas that work for the whole family. You can nurture a family’s familiarity and comfort with active play by making these experience part of each home visit as an opening or closing ritual. You can also demonstrate active play activities that parents showed interest in trying during a visit. Visits may also occasionally be scheduled at community locations like playgrounds, family resource centers, or parks, which can provide another way to support the introduction of active play into the family’s daily/weekly schedule.

Reflective Questions

Consider selecting some of these questions as a way to guide your discussion with families about active play:

1. Use the ELOF to identify typical physical skills for the child's age. Talk with parents about what physical skills their child has mastered. Which is their child working on? What play activities might help their child build those skills?
2. What physical activities does your child currently enjoy? What physical activities do you/others in your home enjoy?
3. What are the challenges your family faces in helping your toddler be active?
4. What ways does your family incorporate activity into your daily life at present?
5. How often does your child watch television/engage in screen-based activities? Would you like to change/reduce your child's screen time?
6. Tell me about your family's routine on weekdays. When might there be time for active play for your child or whole family?
7. How does your routine differ on weekends? When might there be time for active play for your child or whole family on weekends or whenever you might have days off?
8. What interests does your child have at this time—dinosaurs, trains, butterflies, etc.?
9. What community locations (parks/playgrounds/ etc.) have you visited? Has your child enjoyed these experiences? Why/why not?
10. Does your child have special needs that may impact his/her movement/physical activity skills? Do you feel confident about identifying appropriate opportunities for your child to engage in active play?

Related Resources on ECKLC

- [Active Play: Health Tips for Families](#)
- [Growing Healthy Family Goals Worksheet](#)
- [Healthy Active Living Resources—A Virtual Tour](#)
- [Implementing Physical Activities with Children in Mixed-Age Groups](#)
- [Let's Talk About Movement](#)
- [Strategies to Support and Encourage Healthy Active Living Course](#)
- [Tummy Time](#)

Additional Resources

- [Choosy Kids: Resources for Healthy and Active Living](#)

