

Indoor Play Time- Topic of the Month

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Daily activity is an important part of a child’s physical, mental, and emotional development. When you can’t go outside, finding ways to stay active indoors can still be fun and rewarding. This memo will focus on the benefits of daily activity for children and how to support families in staying active.

Recommendations

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) shared recommendations in [Making Physical Activity a Way of Life: AAP Policy Explained](#) that infants and children have time for physical activity every day.

- **For infants:** 30 minutes spread throughout the day.
- **For children aged three to five:** 3+ hours of activity spread throughout the day.

It may be easier when the weather is warm to say active outdoors, but when it’s too cold or the family is quarantined indoors, finding ways to stay active may be challenging. The AAP also shared in the [Power of Play in Early Childhood](#) the undeniable benefits of being active and tips to support families. Below we highlight the important benefits.

Benefits of physical activity

- **Growth:** Build stronger muscles, bones, and a healthy heart.
- **Fitness:** Promote strength and flexibility.
- **Motor Skills:** Develop coordination and fine motor skills.
- **Weight:** Maintain a healthy weight and improve body image.
- **Brain Power:** Improve concentration, connection, and memory.
- **Mental Health:** Boost moods and build self-esteem and self-confidence.
- **Social Skills:** Hone communication skills, non-verbal cues, and the ability to work as a part of a team, when being active together.

WIC’s role

During a nutrition education appointment, staff can check in with the parent/caregiver to see how they are engaging their children in exercise and play time. Using the [WIC Nutrition Assessment](#) tools reminds us to inquire about physical (section **E- 900’s Environmental/Other Factors**). There are no dietary risk codes associated with lack of physical activity; however, it is an opportunity to offer guidance.

Offering recommendations, suggestions, and resources can help support parents and children in their play time. Here are some ideas for open-ended questions to help start the conversation:

- “Tell me about how you engage baby in activity.”
 - “It’s great you are getting some tummy time. May I offer some other suggestions?”
- “What are some physical activities your child enjoys?”
 - “Your kiddo is adventurous, have you tried these activities with him?”
- “What kind of activities do you enjoy sharing with your child?”
 - “I think it’s great that you are taking an interest in what is important to your child.”
 - “This is such a great way for you and your child to bond! He is learning so much.”

Getting families engaged

Encouraging families to engage in physical activity can be challenging for some. It may be best to suggest small steps that they can take to help make active time a manageable part of their already busy lives. Starting with the benefits may help to encourage a shift in the way families are doing things. Giving them ideas and resources will support them in taking action.

Find the space

How much space is enough? Carving out space to play is best done with a barrier between work or school and play. Parents can dedicate one area or room for play, use a rug to create borders, or move furniture away from the wall to create a fun new space to explore. Another idea is to build a fort in the middle of a room. The important thing to remember, creativity can turn any space into a “play space”.

Find the time

Finding dedicated time to play is just as important for parents/caregivers as it is for children. Spending time together not only strengthens the family bond; it also helps children learn, builds communication skills, and creates a sense of belonging and security. Additionally, engaging in an activity that is important to a child shows you support their interests.

Screen time

Screens are everywhere, it can be challenging when children fight to turn off the television, tablet, or phone. The [AAP- Media and Young Minds](#) has set recommendations for screen time that includes limitations for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. The policy highlights the importance of technology not interfering in “sleep, **exercise, play**, reading out loud, and social interaction”.

Media recommendations:

- **Under 18 months:** Discourage use of digital media other than video-chatting, with parents present.
- **Age 18-24 months:** Discourage use; if introducing technology, limit time and chose high-quality programming with parent present.
- **Age 2-5:** No more than 1 hour (or less) per day of digital media. Encourage high-quality programming with parental guidance.

The AAP developed the [Kids & Screen Time: 5 C's Questions for Toddlers & Preschoolers](#) that help families to determine if and how media may be is effecting their child.

Finding the right toys

Toys come in many shapes and sizes; parents/caregivers should consider developmental needs when choosing these “tools for play” for their children. The [AAP- Selecting Appropriate Toys for Young Children in the Digital Area](#) has provided guidance to consider for parents at home and when children are in the WIC office. [Smart Toys for Every Age](#) is an easy-to-read toy guide that may be shared with parents.

When selecting a toy, it is important to take into consideration potential benefits versus possible harm. For example, does the toy have small pieces and could be a choking hazard. Choosing age-appropriate toys can keep children safe while engaging them in play. Additionally, keep in mind that toys are not a replacement for human connection, toys should be used to enhance interaction when shared together and support learning when used alone.

Resources for families

[Wichealth.org](#)- Lesson: Happy, Healthy, Active Children.

[Happy, Healthy, Active](#)- Minnesota WIC Child Activity Card.

[At-Home Activity Guide](#)- Zero to Three. Promote play with this at-home activity guide.

[Follow Along Program](#)- Minnesota Department of Health (MDH). Learn more about your child's development, find ideas for age-appropriate activities, and find beneficial services.

[Indoor Activities Toolkit](#)- TalkingisTeaching.org

[GoNoodle](#)- GoNoodle is free and engages kids with movement and mindfulness videos.

[Smart Toys for Every Age](#)- KidsHealth.org.

References- complete listing of hyperlinks:

[Making Physical Activity a Way of Life: AAP Policy Explained](#)
(<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/healthy-living/fitness/Pages/Making-Fitness-a-Way-of-Life.aspx>)

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[Power of Play in Early Childhood](https://www.aap.org/en/patient-care/early-childhood/early-childhood-health-and-development/power-of-play/?srsltid=AfmBOoplXwhiOJDz-nZhvwTlzFkcZmfRyV0zGfedr7hyqrs_Qwjrj7e) (https://www.aap.org/en/patient-care/early-childhood/early-childhood-health-and-development/power-of-play/?srsltid=AfmBOoplXwhiOJDz-nZhvwTlzFkcZmfRyV0zGfedr7hyqrs_Qwjrj7e)

[WIC Nutrition Assessment](https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/training/na.html#NaN)

(<https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/training/na.html#NaN>)

[AAP- Media and Young Minds](https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/138/5/e20162591)

(<https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/138/5/e20162591>)

[Kids & Screen Time: 5 C's Questions for Toddlers & Preschoolers](https://www.healthychildren.org/English/family-life/Media/Pages/kids-and-screen-time-5-cs-questions-for-toddlers-and-preschoolers.aspx)

(<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/family-life/Media/Pages/kids-and-screen-time-5-cs-questions-for-toddlers-and-preschoolers.aspx>)

[AAP- Selecting Appropriate Toys for Young Children in the Digital Area](https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/143/1/e20183348)

(<https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/143/1/e20183348>)

[Wichealth.org](https://wichealth.org/) (<https://wichealth.org/>)

[Happy, Healthy, Active](https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/nutrition/english/childactive.pdf)

(<https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/nutrition/english/childactive.pdf>)

[At-Home Activity Guide](https://www.zerotothree.org/resource/at-home-activity-guide) (<https://www.zerotothree.org/resource/at-home-activity-guide>)

[Follow Along Program](https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/childreneyouth/fap/index.html) (<https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/childreneyouth/fap/index.html>)

[Indoor Activities Toolkit](https://talkingsteaching.org/parent-resource/indoor-activities-kit/) (<https://talkingsteaching.org/parent-resource/indoor-activities-kit/>)

[GoNoodle](https://www.gonoodle.com/) (<https://www.gonoodle.com/>)

[Smart Toys for Every Age](https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/smart-toys.html) (<https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/smart-toys.html>)

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