

memo

DATE: March 3, 2021
TO: WIC Coordinators and LA Staff
FROM: Carole Kelnhofer, Training Coordinator
SUBJECT: Indoor Play Time – Topic of the Month

Daily activity is an important part of a child’s physical, mental, and emotional development. When it’s too cold to go outside, finding ways to stay active indoors can be fun and rewarding. Staying active also helps children stay positive when their world is constantly changing. This memo will focus on the benefits of daily activity for children and how to support families in staying active.

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.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that infants and children have time for physical activity every day. For infants, 30 minutes spread throughout the day may include a variety of age-appropriate activities. For children age three to five, 3 hours of activity spread throughout the day is best. Refer to the article [Making Physical Activity a Way of Life: AAP Policy Explained](#) for more details.

It may be easier when the weather is warm to stay active outdoors, but when it’s too cold or the family is quarantined indoors, finding ways to stay active may be challenging. The following are some tips to help parents incorporate physical activity into family life.

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 Time Together

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.

Getting Children Engaged

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”. The AAP developed a [Family Media Plan](#) that families can use to help manage the amount of screen time children enjoy.

- 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.

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 Era](#) has provided guidance to consider for parents at home and when children are in the WIC office. [How to Buy Safe Toys](#) 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 that 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.

Smart Toys by Age

- Babies (age 0-1): mirror, stacking blocks or rings, push/pull toys
- Toddlers (age 1-3): balls, shapes and sorting toys, role play toys
- Preschoolers (age 3-5): arts and crafts, blocks and balls, constructions set or building blocks, puzzles

Role of WIC Staff

During a nutrition education appointment, check in with the parent/caregiver to see how they are engaging their children in exercise and play time. Using the [PCS Diet Assessment Tools](#), staff

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can find Physical Activity under 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.”

Resources to Offer

- Wichealth.org, Lessons: Children Ages 1-5 and Infants.
- [Happy, Healthy, Active](#), Minnesota WIC Child Activity Card.
- [Zero to Three, At Home Activity Guide](#), 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.
- [Talking is Teaching](#), Indoor Activities Toolkit
- [GoNoodle](#), GoNoodle is free and engages kids with movement and mindfulness videos.
- [Indoor Play Ideas: Fun Ways for Families to Connect this Winter](#) (AAP)
- [Simple Ways to Entertain & Boost Your Baby’s Development at Home](#) (AAP)
- [The Power of Play- How Fun and Games Help Children Thrive](#) (AAP)
- [Family Media Plan](#) (AAP)
- [How to Buy Safe Toys](#) (AAP)

Reference-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)
(<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/healthy-living/fitness/Pages/Making-Fitness-a-Way-of-Life.aspx>)

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

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

[Family Media Plan](https://www.healthychildren.org/English/media/Pages/default.aspx) (<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/media/Pages/default.aspx>)

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

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

[How to Buy Safe Toys](#)

[PCS Diet Assessment Tools](https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/training/pcs/assessment/index.html)

(<https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/training/pcs/assessment/index.html>)

[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>)

[Zero to Three: At Home Activity Guide](https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/3264-at-home-activity-guide) (<https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/3264-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>)

[Talking is Teaching](https://talkingisteaching.org/) (<https://talkingisteaching.org/>)

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

[Indoor Play Ideas: Fun Ways for Families to Connect this Winter](https://www.healthychildren.org/English/family-life/work-play/Pages/Indoor-Play-Ideas-winter.aspx)

(<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/family-life/work-play/Pages/Indoor-Play-Ideas-winter.aspx>)

[Simple Ways to Entertain & Boost Your Baby's Development at Home](https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/COVID-19/Pages/Simple-Ways-to-Boost-Your-Babys-Development-at-Home.aspx)

(<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/COVID-19/Pages/Simple-Ways-to-Boost-Your-Babys-Development-at-Home.aspx>)

[The Power of Play- How Fun and Games Help Children Thrive](https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/toddler/fitness/Pages/Caution-Children-at-Play.aspx)

(<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/toddler/fitness/Pages/Caution-Children-at-Play.aspx>)

[Family Media Plan](https://www.healthychildren.org/English/media/Pages/default.aspx) (<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/media/Pages/default.aspx>)

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