

In the home



The home environment is a crucial setting for instilling physical activity as part of a child's daily life.

However, with many parents working longer hours and facing long commutes to and from work, families are finding it increasingly hard to fit physical activity into their daily routine.

As a result of our lifestyles, children's physical activity is often structured, revolving around sports or other planned programs or activities. There is less opportunity for spontaneous and unstructured play, such as backyard cricket, playing tag, jumping on the trampoline or using a skipping rope, which helps promote important development skills, including fair play, decision-making and resilience.

Our strong focus on academic achievement also means children are spending more time on homework and study, leaving less time for active leisure and play.

Ready access to technology in the home means that children's leisure time is all too often taken up with computer games, watching television or using social media to communicate with friends rather than getting out into the backyard to throw a ball or climb a tree (ABS 2012b, ABS 2013b).

While it's difficult to directly influence what happens in individual homes, educators, council staff, community

workers, coaches, school staff and committees can help to influence and educate parents and carers they come in contact with about the importance of children's physical activity and getting active as a family.

The home is also where we can have an influence on children as parents and role models, not just as professionals.

Benefits to families of being active together

Being active as a family has enormous health and wellbeing benefits. Family members can keep each other motivated and encourage each other to stretch themselves.

Getting out and about within the local neighbourhood and broader community opens up opportunities to explore and be creative as a family – and the shared experience can lead to closer connections.

It also lays the groundwork to support children to remain active throughout their lives.

'Parents are our first role models, providing early guidance on what's important and what should be valued. As such, it's crucial that children see their parents or carers being active and have opportunities to be active together as a family – it shows them that physical activity is a valuable part of life.'

DIANA HEGGIE, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, HEART FOUNDATION VICTORIA



Practical actions for encouraging active families

Shifting the concepts of design and time, can create more opportunities for children and families to be active within their home environments.



ACTION

Consider how technology can be used to support more active lifestyles in children by addressing barriers or providing motivation to be active. This may include social media, mobile applications or websites.



Consider:

- How to increase families' access to information on local physical activity opportunities, such as through a calendar of events.
- Ways to collect data and monitor levels of activity, such as recording trips walked to school or monitoring use and capacity of facilities.
- Engaging community members to collaboratively develop solutions to address barriers to being active.
- Online improvements to make it easier for people to access opportunities, such as court hire bookings, programs or membership registrations.

The use of technology to connect and share has the potential to encourage and connect children to physical activity.



What role can technology play in addressing barriers to children being active?



ACTION

Encourage families to be active together to increase each member's personal activity level and strengthen relationships (see the Integrating active play into family life case study p 42).



Consider:

- Leveraging state-wide family-based activity programs to promote and encourage participation by local families.
- Promoting local activities, places and spaces for families to be active.

Parents have a strong influence on how active their children are. Greater parental involvement is positively associated with higher levels of children's physical activity (Ridgers 2013).



What opportunities are there for families to be active together and how can this be communicated to support changes in behaviour?



ACTION

Provide support to influence the way children spend their leisure time so they're sitting less and engaging more in outside play and sport-based games.



Consider:

- Raising awareness about the health impacts of sitting for children.
- Using existing resources to encourage more active and outdoor play within the home environment, such as sport games in the backyard or establishing and maintaining a home vegetable garden.
- How sport and physical activity is promoted to children and families so that they want to get involved.

Parents setting and enforcing rules around the amount of time children spend in front of computers, televisions and electronic games has been shown to reduce screen-based sedentary behaviour in children, as can limiting access to televisions and computers in the home and particularly in children's bedrooms (Ridgers 2013).



How can children's leisure time be influenced to include more activity?

Further information and resources to support these actions are available on VicHealth's website (www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/activeforlife)

CASE STUDY

Integrating active play into family life

Glastonbury Child & Family Services has developed an initiative to build children's self-esteem and bring families together through active play.

The Community Active Play (CAP) program, aimed at children up to 6 years of age and their parents, has been delivered through playgroups in the Golden Plains Shire, Surf Coast Shire, Colac Otway Shire and City of Greater Geelong.

Initially, playgroup facilitators worked with families to identify priorities for their children and develop relevant plans and activities that could then be incorporated into the home environment.

The aims of the program were to:

- enhance children's development through active play
- strengthen relationships between parents and children
- support families to be involved in local community activities.

Evaluation of the program showed increases in children's activity levels and an enhanced ability to self-initiate active play.

As the program rolled out and the children were better able to participate and create their own activities, the facilitators were able to focus on changing the play environment to give the children more interesting and challenging opportunities for activity.

Activities included walks in the park, exploring natural environments, balancing with objects, using recycled materials and dancing to music – many of which could be delivered at little or no cost.

As well as building children's confidence and enjoyment of activities, the program provided an avenue for reaching out to local families and building stronger community networks.



The program also helped build parents' confidence to continue the activities with their children at home and in their own time.

A CAP resource has been developed so playgroups and parents can continue to provide active play opportunities for their children.

The CAP program was funded by VicHealth under the Active Participation Grants: Regional and Rural Sustainability program.