

Eyes on



# Physical activity and young children

A fun and healthy habit



ABORIGINAL PARENTS



Centre of Excellence  
for Early Childhood  
Development



STRATEGIC KNOWLEDGE  
CLUSTER ON EARLY

*child development*



***“The first few years of life are the best time for you to help your child develop a positive attitude to healthy eating and active living. He’ll carry this attitude to his later years.”***

***Melanie Ferris,  
Huntinghawk Communications***

Excerpted from: Best Start Resource Centre (2010). *Let’s Be Healthy Together: Getting active.* Toronto: Health Nexus.

## What do we know?



- Physical activity is a part of your child’s daily routine. Playing ball, running, and dancing are all vigorous activities. Children are active even when standing and drumming or walking exploring Mother Earth, but are not when they sit or lie down to watch TV, play video games, read or draw.
- The early years represent the perfect time to introduce physical activity as a life-long healthy habit.
- Physical activity has positive effects on your child health, including your child’s body, mind, spirit, and emotions. In the long term, it can also keep your child from developing health problems (like cardiovascular diseases), and promote healthy bones, good motor skills, and good social and emotional development.
- Young children who are physically active on a daily basis are more likely to maintain a healthy weight.
- Many young children do not take part in enough physical activity to stay healthy.
- Children are more active when their parents, extended family, and communities have an active lifestyle and take part in physical activity with them.
- Boys are more active than girls.
- The more children play outside, the more physically active they are likely to be.
- When young children are inactive (for example, watching television), they are at risk for developing health issues, including weight problems. Preschool children who watch more than 2 hours of television a day are more likely than others to experience health and developmental problems.
- There is no evidence that using electronic media can benefit your child’s health or education under the age of 2. In fact, in children who watch a lot of television in these first few years, it has been shown that:
  - They are likely to experience problems with their attention span later on;
  - They are at risk for developing language and memory difficulties;
  - They tend to experience more difficulties in school than children who do not watch a lot of television.
- For children who attend child care facilities on a regular basis, the setting can play a crucial role in ensuring that they get the amount of physical activity they need.

Paying attention to...

What can you do?

... your child's participation in physical activities.

- Provide unstructured and structured activities that your child can take part in and enjoy (walk, garden, play ball, climb in a jungle gym, bike).
- If your child can walk, allow him to be active for at least 3 hours a day.
- Emphasize fun and participation rather than competition, and be a play partner for your child. Some things you can do as a family include jiggling, growing a garden, or learning to dance in a pow wow.
- Encourage your child to spend time outdoors, ideally several hours every day.
- Make sure your daughter and your son are equally active.
- Arrange a play partner for your child to motivate him to be active.

... long periods of inactivity.

- Take care that your child is not inactive for more than one hour at a time (except for sleeping).
- Divide long motorized trips by 10 to 15 minute energizing breaks.
- Whenever possible, encourage your child to walk rather than sit in a stroller or be carried on your back.

... the time spent using television and electronic media.

- Ban televisions and game consoles from your child's bedroom and, if possible, from the child-care centre.
- Discourage the use of television and electronic media with children under 2, and limit it to 1 hour a day for children between 2 and 5.

... be a role model for your child.

- Be active and have fun with your child with activities such as gardening, gathering berries, bike riding, and exploring your traditional lands.

... the child care environment.

- Look for a setting that has enough outdoor space, equipment, and shaded areas.
- Choose a safe and secure environment where staff promotes physical activity for young children.



# Information

This Key Message is a publication of the Centre of Excellence for Early Childhood Development (CEECD) and the Strategic Knowledge Cluster on Early Child Development (SKC-ECD). These organizations identify and summarize the best scientific work on early childhood development. They disseminate this knowledge to a variety of audiences in formats and languages adapted to their needs.

For a more in-depth understanding of physical activity, consult the synthesis and experts' articles on this topic in the Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development, available free of charge at [www.child-encyclopedia.com](http://www.child-encyclopedia.com).

Several funders financially support the CEECD and the SKC-ECD, including the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, Université Laval, and private foundations. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the official policies of these organizations.

We are grateful to The Lawson Foundation for its financial contribution to produce this Key Message.



**Coordinator:**

Nathalie Moragues

**Advisory Committee:**

Donna Atkinson (NCCA)

Julie Bernier (FNQLHSSC)

Melanie Ferris (Huntinghawk Communications)

Christine Lamothe (Government of Nunavut)

Annie Nulukie (KRG)

Nadine Rousselot (FNQLHSSC)

**Collaborators:**

Claire Gascon Giard

Marie-Pierre Gosselin

**Copy editors:**

Valérie Bell

Sandra Braun

**Photos:**

Fred Cottroll (p. 2)

Jennifer Fontaine (p. 1 and 4)

**Graphic design:**

DesJardins Conception Graphique inc.

## Centre of Excellence for Early Childhood Development

GRIP-Université de Montréal

P.O. Box 6128, Succursale Centre-ville

Montreal, Quebec H3C 3J7

Telephone: 514.343.6111, extension 2541

Fax: 514.343.6962

E-mail: [cedje-ceecd@umontreal.ca](mailto:cedje-ceecd@umontreal.ca)

Website: [www.excellence-earlychildhood.ca](http://www.excellence-earlychildhood.ca)



In this document, the masculine form is used to simplify the text. No discrimination is intended.



STRATEGIC KNOWLEDGE  
CLUSTER ON EARLY  
*child development*

THE  
LAWSON  
FOUNDATION