

**Early movers**

Helping under-5s live active & healthy lives



## <sup>7</sup> **Getting parents and carers involved**



BHF National Centre  
**physical activity+health**

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# Building better partnerships



## The importance of parent and carer support

Parental support is vital to help young children make the most of being active, all day and every day. By working closely with parents and carers you can ensure that they're:

- aware of the importance of physical activity for their children – and themselves
- able to support their child to be physically active
- aware of activities they can do with their children.



Many early years resources highlight the importance of working in close partnership with parents and carers. For more information, see Section 1, page 15.





## Keeping parents and carers informed

Parents and carers will be able to help their under-5s be more active if you let them know:

- the benefits of movement for babies and physical activity for young children – and for themselves. You can use the parent leaflets included in this guide to help
- your philosophy on physical activity, eg, details of your physical activity policy, and especially how you promote active travel
- about events in the local community, including places of local interest and family activities they and their children can do there
- information about the daily physical activities you provide
- how well their child is doing in physical activities, and what they enjoy (or don't enjoy)
- what their child has liked during the day, so they can do similar activities elsewhere.



## Communicating with parents and carers

There are a number of ways of communicating with parents and carers, depending on what information you need to get across. They can include:

- termly meetings of parents and carers
- individual parent meetings
- a newsletter
- a noticeboard
- your setting's website
- emailing
- texting
- social networking/media, eg, Twitter and Facebook
- distributing information leaflets and booklets. (See Section 1, page 9)
- informal contact with parents and carers, eg, at drop off and pick up times
- family support visits
- holding special/social events.

It can be helpful to have a parent representative as some parents may find them easier to talk to than staff. You could advertise on your setting's noticeboard and outline what's expected, eg, attendance at certain meetings to put forward any parent views or concerns.

### Talking to parents

Occasionally, you may need to discuss a difficult subject, such as concerns about a child's physical development. This will obviously need to be handled sensitively.



If you feel you'd benefit from some additional support in this area either through shadowing, mentoring, resources or training, refer to resources about engaging with parents and carers in Section 1, page 15.





### Case study

## Hampden Way Nursery School and Children's Centre

Hampden Way is a Phase 3 Children's Centre, which offers community services to 1,500 families. Although it's situated in a 70% deprivation area, there are pockets of greater deprivation in their reach area.

They have a small team consisting of a Centre Coordinator, two Family Support and Outreach Workers, an Early Years Professional and an Administration and Support Officer.

The centre has used a Healthy Lifestyles project to engage with parents and childminders and, as well as highlighting all the benefits, has introduced families to fun ways of being active together. Work around healthy eating has included: trying out recipes, discussions about portion sizes, food labelling, weaning and fussy eaters. The sessions are delivered by experts and have targeted Stay and Play, Baby Group and childminder sessions.

As part of the project, they've been encouraging more outdoor play and introducing fun, inexpensive and innovative ways to enjoy different forms of physical activity.

The centre has successfully engaged with the parents and childminders through a variety of methods, including an initial questionnaire and regular consultations and discussions, formally in workshop sessions and informally by trying out new physical activity ideas and recipes.

The Centre Coordinator says, "Parents are enjoying the new activities and resources available and many more have been accessing the outdoor area without being cajoled into it. Parents have told us they've tried making some of the resources at home and appreciate the ideas we've suggested. They're also trying the recipes at home and talking about healthy snacks."

The Centre Coordinator says that although there were some initial difficulties in encouraging the parents to use the outdoor area, these were overcome by introducing fun activities and talking to parents about the importance of physical activity.

Staff training has increased their confidence in passing on the correct messages and the reasons behind them.

## Consulting parents and carers

It's often helpful to ask parents and carers for their input on, eg:

- the development of a physical activity policy
- the planning and development of a physical activity programme
- ideas for a special physical activity event
- activities their children like playing at home.

A questionnaire is a really useful way of getting parents' and carers' views on a number of issues at the same time.

## Involving parents and carers

Parents' and carers' involvement is crucial to making sure their child's early experiences of physical activity are positive. It's important that parents encourage their child's participation as much as possible when they're not in your care.

Some parents and carers may need more encouragement to get involved, and you may need to ask them about their own experiences to understand their attitudes to physical activity.

Holding a workshop about what may stop children being active, and what parents can do to help, can give parents and carers a better understanding of the benefits of physical activity and how it can help their child learn. This can be a key trigger in getting them to take positive steps towards being more active with their child.



Check with your local authority about parent engagement courses they may be running. For more information see Section 3, page 12.



# Encouraging parent and carer support



## Supporting their child to be physically active

Parental encouragement and support of a young child's physical activity is key to them participating. Parents and carers can support their child in being active in many ways:

### Getting them ready to play outdoors

Apart from the most extreme weather conditions, children should be prepared to play outside in all weathers. They'll need a warm coat, hat, scarf and gloves for the winter months and, if possible, wellies and waterproof clothing for wet weather. In the summer, sun hats, sun creams and thin long sleeved tops are essential for hot weather, especially if there is limited shade.





## Helping them be active

However long a young child spends with you, it's still only a part of their day. So, it's vital that parents and carers understand the importance of providing opportunities for their child to be active at other times of the day, and at weekends too.

The ideas on page 11 can help parents and carers encourage more physically active play on weekdays and weekends:



'The Help your baby move and play every day' and 'Help your child move and play every day' leaflets included in this guide have lots of tips for parents and carers on encouraging their under-5s to be active every day. To order more for your parents and carers, please call the BHF Orderline on 0870 6006566, email [orderline@bhf.org.uk](mailto:orderline@bhf.org.uk) or visit [bhf.org.uk/publications](https://bhf.org.uk/publications)



## Weekday ideas

### Children can:

- play at home in the morning, eg, playing with toys, moving around from one activity to another
- walk (or bike, trike, scooter) to your setting
- play at the setting before the day formally begins. (Parents can stay and encourage their children to be active in your play area, if you have one)
- take part in two active breaks during the day
- take part in two structured or adult-led activity sessions, eg, action rhymes, music and movement, play with small equipment
- walk (bike, trike, scooter) home with their parents (perhaps playing on the way home, eg, at the park, meet and play with friends)
- play with parents and/or siblings in their home or garden, eg, active games, dancing to music, play with bubbles/balloons/streamers, play equipment in the garden
- play alone, eg, dressing up/play acting, play with toys.

## Weekend/holiday ideas

### Children can:

- play with siblings at home or in the garden
- play with the family, eg, games, walk in green space (local forest, open space/countryside)
- meet up and play with friends/siblings at their home or elsewhere, eg, park, indoor play area
- play alone, eg, with toys
- play with parents, eg, action rhymes or games, small equipment, outdoor play equipment, dancing together
- walk to the shops, local library, place of worship, community event, run an errand, with parents
- take part in organised activity sessions, eg, early years session, swimming pool family session, community events
- play in outdoor play areas, eg, park, playground
- help with everyday tasks at home, eg, sorting out washing, tidying up and sorting out toys, laying the table for meals.



## Rewarding participation in physical activity

Parents and carers need to offer encouragement and praise their children for taking part in physical activity. They can do this by:

- encouraging them to try new activities
- praising their efforts and achievements (however small), to build their confidence
- recognising and rewarding these achievements. You could use a sharing board where parents and carers post photographs of activities and share information (tickets, leaflets) of events they've attended. These can be a starting point for sessions where children can talk about their experiences and achievements.





# Promoting family physical activity



## Holding a special physical activity event

**This could be a ‘family fun event’ or part of a larger community or fundraising event, which you could get involved in. It could include some simple activities for families to try out, or showcase some of the physical activities that the children have taken part in when they’re at your setting, eg, parachute games, moving to music, baby yoga and massage.**

Encourage parents and carers to get involved by providing help and support. Ask if they have any special skills that they’d be willing to contribute to the day, eg, leading a dance session, playing a musical instrument, organising small groups of children to participate in new games, taking an adult keep fit session.

NB. If you involve any parents and carers in leading sessions or having unsupervised access to sessions, they’ll need to have had all the relevant checks to meet legal requirements covering safeguarding, eg, CRB checks.

For more information, visit:  
[www.crb.gov.uk](http://www.crb.gov.uk) (for England and Wales),  
[www.disclosurescotland.co.uk](http://www.disclosurescotland.co.uk) (for Scotland)  
[www.accessni.gov.uk](http://www.accessni.gov.uk) (for Northern Ireland).



## Promoting active travel

**Active travel is valuable for keeping us all fit, especially children. It involves using activities such as walking, pedalling a bike or trike or using a scooter, to travel.**

As well as offering both children and families an opportunity to build physical activity into their daily routine, it provides a great chance for young children to learn about road and pedestrian safety. It also gives them the chance to enjoy being outdoors in different seasons, environments and weather conditions.

Encourage parents and carers to use active travel on their way to and from your setting, even if they live some distance away, by:

- making them aware of the benefits to adults and children, and getting them to think about how they might make some changes to incorporate more active travel into their lives generally, eg, by leaving the car at home when they run short errands, or walking more at weekends
- encouraging them to park a short distance from your setting and letting their child actively travel the rest of the way on foot or on wheels. (They can gradually increase the distance as the child gets stronger)
- providing a secure place for buggies, bikes, trikes and scooters etc
- adopting a travel plan with clearly mapped safe routes.

### Developing a travel plan

Developing a travel plan is key to promoting active travel. By working with parents, carers and the local authority, you can map safe routes to your setting and other community venues, such as play and leisure facilities. Letting people know what you're planning to do can make the idea of active travel more appealing to parents and carers, as safety is often a key concern.

### Organising special active travel promotions

Try holding a special 'walk/pedal' to your setting 'day' or 'week'. A special event can stimulate enthusiasm and interest for active travel and give you the opportunity to explain your active travel aims. It could be linked to established national walking events such as 'National walk/cycle to school week' to give the event added appeal.

Some settings have adopted local authority school run schemes, like the Star Walker scheme in Leicestershire, which rewards children with stickers and small prizes for regularly using active travel. Contact your local authority to find out if there's a scheme like this in your area.



## Family learning

In England, Family Learning supports parents and carers and other family members to get involved and help with their children's learning. Local authorities provide specific programmes, many of which focus on encouraging play and language development in the early years. Visit [www.familylearning.org.uk](http://www.familylearning.org.uk) to find out more.

Your local authority website will have details of the latest courses and sessions available in your area. Contact them to find out if you can host an event, and let interested families know about any play and language development sessions available.

## Stay and play sessions

You could host regular informal parent and baby/child play sessions, which can give parents and carers time to play with their child before they go off to work. If possible, you could set aside space specifically for this, with a staff member on hand to help with new play ideas and equipment.

You could also hold more formal parent and baby/child physically active play sessions, where parents and carers can take part in pre-arranged activities with their child, eg, moving to music, action rhymes, small equipment play.

These sessions are an excellent way to let parents and carers know about the benefits of physical activity (for more information, see Section 2 pages 6–11), and provide them with lots of ideas for playing with their child at home. You can also use them to tell parents and carers about any new physical activity schemes or initiatives you're involved in.





## Take-home equipment bags and other resources

As we've said, a positive way of engaging with parents and carers is to give them ideas and activities that they can do with their children at home, eg, simple activity cards to take home and try out. These could be linked to activities, which the children have already been taking part in, and could include a personal record chart with stickers, which reward effort and achievement.

You can also provide take-home bags of basic play equipment, eg, balls, a bat, skipping rope, beanbag, hoop and activity cards, which parents and carers sign out and return after a specified time, eg, a week.

NB. It's important that parents and carers understand that the equipment needs to be returned in good, clean condition on the date specified.

Bags can be made up fairly cheaply by asking parents and carers to help out, attending local car boot sales or National Childbirth Trust Nearly New sales. Visit [www.nct.org.uk/branches/events/nearly-new-sales](http://www.nct.org.uk/branches/events/nearly-new-sales) or contact Scrapstores UK at: [www.childrensscrapstore.co.uk](http://www.childrensscrapstore.co.uk) to find out your nearest scrapstore.

It's a good idea to hold a Family Learning session (see above) to introduce the take-home bag concept and activity card ideas, so that parents and carers can appreciate their full potential.

There are booklets and other resources with useful activity ideas to help parents and carers too. For lots of downloadable ideas for physically active play for babies, toddlers and pre-schoolers, see Section 1, pages 20–21.



## Tips to help reduce sedentary behaviour

Although many people believe that sitting still for long periods does no harm, evidence suggests that this contributes to overweight and obesity – and lower cognitive development. Children who spend long periods of time sitting still during play times are also missing out on opportunities to develop both physically and socially.

You can help parents and carers to understand this important message by distributing the parent leaflets included in this guide. To order more, information please call the BHF Orderline on 0870 6006566, email [orderline@bhf.org.uk](mailto:orderline@bhf.org.uk) or visit [bhf.org.uk/publications](http://bhf.org.uk/publications)

For more information on the importance of reducing sedentary behaviour, see Section 2, pages 20–21 and for practical tips on reducing sedentary behaviour, see Section 4, pages 24–28.





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