

Early years physical activity guidelines

Being active is important for children under five because it helps them build and maintain a good level of health. Three physical activity guidelines exist in the UK to demonstrate the type and amount of physical activity that benefits health and development.

Guideline 1

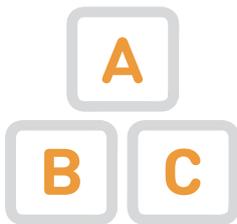
For infants who cannot walk, physical activity should be encouraged from birth, particularly through floor-based play and water-based activities in safe environments.

What counts?

Children who cannot walk can achieve this guideline by having the opportunity to move freely on their tummy or back. Examples of these activities are crawling, rolling, reaching/grasping for objects and pushing or pulling up against furniture.

In your setting...

- Use soft materials to create active, stimulating and safe environments for babies to move freely.
- Create opportunities for short bouts of tummy time throughout the day. Remember to only place babies on their tummies when they are awake and supervised. Babies should always be placed on their backs to sleep.
- Give babies sensory toys to play with, eg, those that light up or make noise. These will encourage them to move – especially if you place the objects out of reach.



Guideline 2

Children of pre-school age who are capable of walking unaided should be physically active daily for at least 180 minutes (3 hours), spread throughout the day.

Children under five do not need to be active for 180 minutes all at once. Activity can be accumulated in short, sporadic bouts throughout the day. For this age group, the focus is on the amount of time spent active rather than the intensity of activity.



What counts?

- Walking, cycling or scooting instead of using the car/bus/train.
- Playing with a variety of equipment, eg, balls, empty boxes, building blocks.
- Playing active games such as running and chasing games.
- Running, jumping, hopping, galloping, skipping or dancing, all of which help to develop locomotor skills.
- Activities which help develop balance such as riding a bike or climbing objects.
- Everyday tasks such as tidying up toys, gardening or helping prepare for meal times.
- Pulling along toys to help develop co-ordination.

In your setting...

- Provide free space for children to play imaginatively either inside or outside.
- Provide equipment to facilitate play, eg, balls, streamers, cardboard boxes.
- Lead structured activities that encourage movement, eg, action songs or organised games.
- Provide shorter more frequent breaks for children to play.
- Join in with activities and let the children see that you are enjoying yourself.

Guideline 3

All under-fives should minimise the amount of time spent being sedentary (being restrained or sitting) for extended periods (except time spent sleeping).

Sedentary behaviour is any activity with low energy expenditure that takes place while sitting or lying down. In the early years spending time sedentary limits the opportunities that children have to move.



What counts?

- Sitting in high chairs, pushchairs or baby walkers.
- Travelling by car, train or bus.
- Sitting while playing games.
- Watching television.
- Additional screen time, eg, using computer, tablets or mobile phones.

There are times when it is necessary for children to sit in high chairs, buggies or car seats but you should aim to minimise this time or break up long periods of sedentary time with play breaks.

In your setting...

- Avoid using restraining equipment for long periods of time.
- Encourage parents to walk, scoot or cycle with their children part or the whole of the way to the setting. Facilitate this by providing somewhere safe to leave bikes or scooters.
- Interact regularly with every child to encourage movement.