

# Move On:

## Reversing Children's Sedentary Lifestyles Part 1

There are two words that continually surface in research associated with young children's health and physical activity: *obesity* and *sedentary*. A sedentary lifestyle is a leading cause of unhealthy children. Considering the amount of time children are spending in out-of-home care (such as preschool and child care), the early educator and the program play a key role in promoting physical activity and healthy lifestyles.

### Let's move on: Team up!

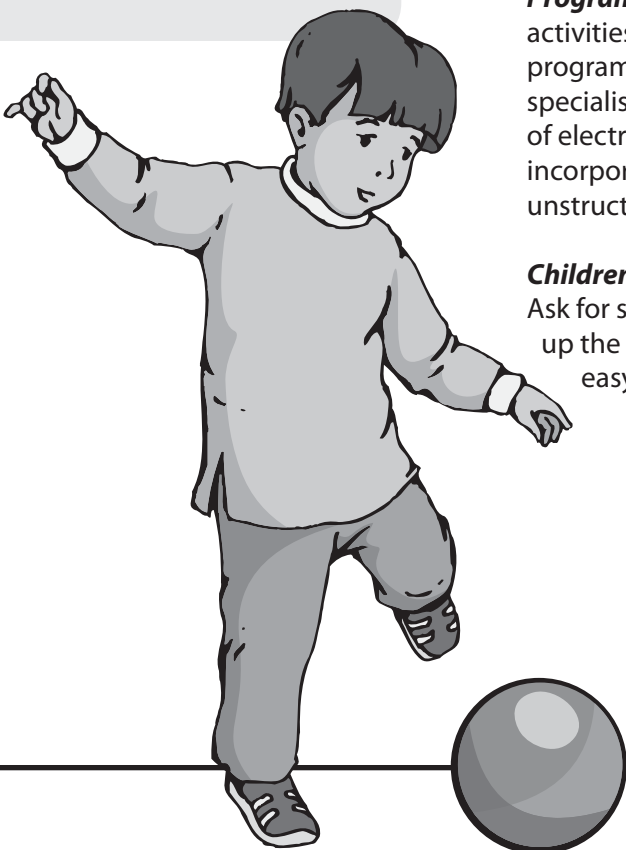
Research shows that children need to make connections to healthy lifestyles from multiple sources in their lives. Help children "move on" toward active lifestyles by making connections:

**Parents** – Find out what parents want for their children in regards to physical activity. Know the health history of their child and concerns or suggestions they have for planning physical activity. Share knowledge and recommendations from reliable health sources, such as the American Academy of Pediatrics [www.AAP.org](http://www.AAP.org), the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports [www.fitness.gov](http://www.fitness.gov), and your state's Department of Education physical fitness guidelines.

**Community** - Connect to sources that are knowledgeable in children's health issues and may offer services, such as pediatricians, physical education teachers, cooperative extension educators, park services, health counselors, physical and occupational therapists, and naturalists.

**Program and Staff** - Plan together to build positive, un-sedentary activities and environments. Be sure to include adults from outside programs who may work with the children, such as early intervention specialists or school nurses, cooks, and so forth. Discuss current trends of electronics use and its effect on children. Develop programming that incorporates enough time for physical activity in both structured and unstructured ways.

**Children** – Discover the children's interests, abilities, likes, and dislikes. Ask for suggestions and help in planning physical activities and setting up the environment, such as building an obstacle course out of easy-to-find and safe objects.

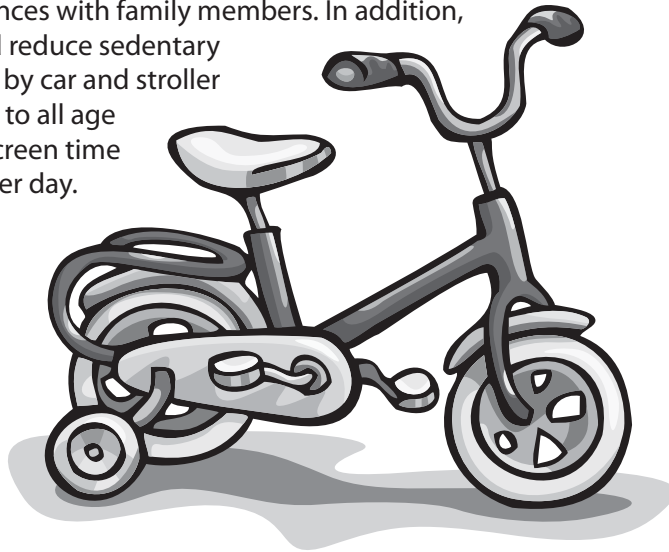


## Recommended physical activity

The *American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP)* has age-appropriate recommendations for physical activity. The following are guidelines from the AAP for infants and toddlers and preschool-aged children (4-6):

**Infants and Toddlers** - There is insufficient evidence to recommend exercise programs or classes for infants and toddlers as a means of promoting increased physical activity or preventing obesity in later years. The AAP suggests that parents be encouraged to provide a safe, nurturing, and minimally structured play environment for infants. Infants and toddlers should also be allowed to enjoy outdoor physical activity and unstructured exploration under the supervision of a responsible adult caregiver. Such activities include walking in the neighborhood, unorganized free play outdoors, and walking through a park or zoo. \*The AAP recommends that children younger than two years not watch any television.

**Preschool-Aged Children (4-6)** – Free play should be encouraged with emphasis on fun, playfulness, exploration, and experimentation while being mindful of safety and proper supervision. Preschool-aged children should take part in unorganized play, preferably on flat surfaces with few variables and instruction limited to a show-and-tell format. Preschoolers should also begin walking tolerable distances with family members. In addition, parents should reduce sedentary transportation by car and stroller and, as applies to all age groups, limit screen time to two hours per day.



### Sources:

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Ginsburg, Kenneth, R., The American Academy of Pediatrics says free and unstructured play is healthy and essential, from Children and Nature Network, [www.childrenandnature.org](http://www.childrenandnature.org)

## Connect to the outdoors

Recent research indicates that the amount of time U.S. children spend outside has declined by 50 percent in the last two decades. Research also shows that children now spend 44.5 hours a week in front of some type of electronic screen. One of the major results of decreased time in nature is a decreased amount of physical activity. Time in nature is needed to support physical activity and is also said to improve academic performance, concentration, balance, coordination, and self-esteem, and even reduces the severity of symptoms of Attention Deficit/Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD).

“Go outside and play” are words that many environmental and health-related groups want to bring back into the everyday repertoire. Many groups are urging a “Call to Action” to promote the health benefits of daily, unstructured outdoor play for children and families.

**“We talk a lot about our children’s future, but not that much about children. It’s time for big conservation organizations to actively engage children and work to protect them, to energize them, and to cultivate their creativity in protecting our world.”**

~R. Louv, author of  
*Last Child in the Woods*

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