



# Speaking for Children

What's best for our youngest children is best for everyone!

## Encouraging Young Children to be Physically Active

Making smart food choices is just one way to help your child maintain a healthy weight.

Exercise, along with a balanced diet, helps your child to grow and develop, to increase his or her confidence, learn problem-solving and social skills, and develop lifelong healthful habits. But according to the American Academy of Pediatrics, almost half of all American children are not getting enough exercise.

With childhood obesity on the rise, it is important to get children into the habit of being physically active early. Recent data released by the National Center for Educational Statistics found that **one out of every five American 4-year-olds is obese**. Obesity in young children can lead to serious health problems including diabetes, hypertension, and orthopedic problems as well as low self-esteem and behavioral issues.

First 5 Sonoma County offers the following tips for parents and caregivers to engage in fun, physical activities with children throughout the day.

### Activities for babies and toddlers:

- Spread a large blanket on the floor or grass. A blanket is a safe, clean place for your baby to stretch and move, roll over, and practice using new muscles.
- Practice "tummy time." Put your baby on her

tummy two or three times every day for a few minutes each time. Increase the time as baby grows stronger. Tummy time helps your baby to develop upper body strength needed to push up and crawl when the time comes. Be sure that whenever baby is on her tummy, you are with her, the surface is flat, and that she is awake.

- Crawl with your baby. Encourage your baby's new crawling skills by getting all fours and racing or chasing your baby.
- Roll a ball. Once your baby can sit up, practice rolling a ball back and forth - even if you may be the only one rolling it at first.
- Encourage your baby to pull himself up on a sturdy piece of furniture (watch for sharp edges) and help him to walk around it.

### Once your child is walking:

- Use push and pull toys. Your child's coordination will develop with practice.
- Dance to music. Children enjoy moving to music. When dancing together, offer your child a scarf or a long ribbon. Let your child move the way he or she wants. Enjoy yourself and have fun.
- Play follow-the-leader. Make it more interesting by pretending you're an animal. Take turns letting your child be the leader.
- Let your child walk instead of riding in a stroller or grocery cart whenever practical.
- Take make believe walks through the snow, in the jungle or other adventurous places - even if you're just going to the mailbox, make it fun!

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## Activities for preschoolers:

The National Association for Sports and Physical Education (NASPE) recommends that preschoolers get **60 minutes of structured physical activity every day** (activity that is organized by you or another adult). It does not have to be all at once - time spent on physical activity should just add up to 60 minutes by the end of the day. The NASPE also suggests that children **should not be inactive for more than one hour at a time**, unless they are sleeping.

- Encourage your child to play outside. Play tag or chase each other, have your child ride a tricycle, or kick and throw a ball.
- Plan a trip to the local park or playground. This is a great place for your child to run and climb.
- Walk the dog, work in the garden, chase bubbles, or just take a walk. These activities help your child burn calories.
- Build an indoor obstacle course. Your child could run or jump through zigzagged shoe boxes, throw a beanbag in a laundry basket, or crawl through a large cardboard box.
- Enroll your child in a dance or tumbling class.
- Be a model for your child. Children who regularly see their parents enjoying sports and physical activity are more likely to do so themselves.
- Turn off the TV. Limit television watching and computer use. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that preschoolers have **no more than 1 to 2 hours of total screen time, including TV, videos, and computers, each day**. (Children under 2 years old should not watch TV at all.) Use the free time to engage in more physical activities.

## Stay Safe

No matter what type of physical activity your child gets, it's important to keep safety concerns in mind. Remember that preschoolers are still developing coordination, balance, and judgment. So as preschoolers play, a parent's challenge is to find a balance between letting them try new things and doing what is necessary to keep them safe and prevent injuries. With that in mind:

- A child on a tricycle or bike should always wear a helmet.
- If you haven't done so already, it's time to talk about street safety, because even the most cautious preschooler may dart into the street after a ball.
- A preschooler in a swimming pool needs constant adult supervision, even if he or she has learned to swim.

Source: [www.pbs.org/parents](http://www.pbs.org/parents)

## Learn More

*Play: It's the way young children learn*, is a pamphlet intended to help teachers and parents understand the importance of play and integrate play into daily practice. *Play, It's the way young children learn* explains how play contributes to school success and provides tips and resources on how parents and teachers can support play. Based on the policy brief *Play in the Early Years: Key to School Success* by the Early Childhood Funders, the easy-to-read pamphlet describes the importance of play for early learning and emphasizes that play is not a break from learning—it's the way young children learn. The pamphlet has been produced in English, Spanish, Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean and Farsi. To view the pamphlet: [www.4children.org/resources/ecf.html](http://www.4children.org/resources/ecf.html). To order free copies (shipping and handling charges only): [www.4children.org/images/pdf/Play\\_brief\\_order\\_form.pdf](http://www.4children.org/images/pdf/Play_brief_order_form.pdf)

**PBS** offers more tips for raising active preschoolers, including information about structured and unstructured play. [www.pbs.org/parents/fitness](http://www.pbs.org/parents/fitness). Articles are:

- Raising a Fit Preschooler
- Elements of Exercise
- Is it Time for Team Sports?
- Playground Safety

**The American Academy of Pediatrics** developed a brochure about the importance of "tummy time" for infants. [www.healthychildcare.org/pdf/SIDStummytime.pdf](http://www.healthychildcare.org/pdf/SIDStummytime.pdf)



## About First 5 Sonoma County

**First 5 Sonoma County** funds children's health insurance and programs that improve childcare quality, help children succeed in school, and help parents provide safe and nurturing environments for their children. For more information on *First 5 Sonoma County* and its programs, please call 565-6626 or visit [www.first5sonomacounty.org](http://www.first5sonomacounty.org)