



INFORMATION SHEET 6

How can parents support their child's physical activity?

How often do parents help their children with their nightly homework? Probably a great deal of the time. Parents encourage their children by setting time slots for homework, sitting down and working with them, or rewarding them for consistently working well at home.

How often do parents work on a particular motor skill component for improvement in skills? Probably not a lot.

While it is an accepted practice that children and youth should be doing homework on a regular basis, the same sentiment is usually not transferred to the physical activity area. Yet growth and development in this area are crucial for the well-being and health of the child. When children play, parents often let them do so by themselves. A valuable routine for children, youth, parents and caregivers would be to target some time each day to spend together being physically active.

The *NSW Schools Fitness and Physical Activity Survey, 1997* found that the influence of parents was a significant factor in promoting participation in physical activity in children and youth. The research suggests that parents' role modelling, support, encouragement and praise, both during games and sport and

outside, act as positive influences in promoting physical activity. The survey also found that the influence of parents, peers and teachers has a significantly greater impact on participation in physical activity among girls than among boys. It is therefore important that we encourage and support girls as much as boys in being physically active.

Parents play an integral part in the development of positive attitudes towards physical activity in their children. "Children's natural energy and enthusiasm can be channelled into experiences where they learn about their bodies, about themselves, and how to cope with others when sharing in movement, games and skill-based activities."

(Australian Sports Commission, 1993, p. 2)

Children are active learners and they need to learn to move with skill. While children's play is often spontaneous and unstructured, children can be taught skills at the same time.

Children participate in many movement and sporting experiences each day. At school, as part of PDHPE and sport, they are introduced to a wide variety of movement experiences in games, dance, gymnastics, athletics and aquatics. These experiences can be further developed at home with parental supervision.



Apart from schools, parents and caregivers play a unique role in supporting and guiding children in developing skills. You can help your child to develop:

- ✧ physically, by initiating games and activities which focus on different movement skills
- ✧ cognitively, by giving him or her problem-solving activities
- ✧ socially, by way of interacting with others, which is important for learning how to share and communicate with others
- ✧ attitudinally, by modelling healthy, active behaviours.

Some points for you to remember are that children:

- ✧ learn at different rates and have different values and interests, sometimes quite different from each other
- ✧ are imaginative and enjoy creating their own games and activities
- ✧ need time to play. It is during this play time that children practise new skills and use them to create new games
- ✧ learn from each other and can work co-operatively
- ✧ learn more efficiently when skills are broken down into smaller components and taught in a sequential manner.

(Australian Sports Commission, 1993)

Putting it into practice

Here are some guidelines to keep in mind as you encourage your child to be active at home.

- ✧ Children's abilities and attention spans are different. Vary the length of each session and the types of activities to suit your child.
- ✧ Move from simple to more complex tasks. Start with rolling the ball along the ground before throwing and catching a ball.
- ✧ Have fun! Keep it informal and free from stress for everyone.
- ✧ Encourage and praise your child's efforts.
- ✧ Success is a great reward, so include activities that you know your child can do well.
- ✧ Listen to your child. Undertake activities or play games that your child suggests.
- ✧ At the end of a play session, share a few quiet moments together with your child.
- ✧ Include activities that bring you together. It's fun and the social and physical interaction which occur between you and your child are very important.

(Australian Sports Commission, 1993)

The involvement of parents is vital for the development of a child's motor skills and attitudes. By taking an interest in your child's physical development and providing opportunities to be involved in physical activity, you are not only investing well in the future of your child's health, but also creating a way to strengthen the bond between you and your children.