

## Encouraging outdoor activity

To make the most of the many benefits gained through spending time outdoors, children and adolescents need to be proactively encouraged to get outside.

Many of the benefits of outdoor activity evolve as children get older, as they become more able to access different environments and be more independent.

The outdoor places where children and adolescents spend time need to be designed to make it easy to be active and for everybody to move about safely within their local neighbourhood.

Enabling children and adolescents to walk or cycle to local parks and community places can help form patterns of physical activity and provide opportunities for older children to develop independence and confidence.

Be a good role model to your children and get active with them.

## Where to find more information

You don't have to travel far to be active outdoors.



Walk or ride to school at least one day per week and encourage your friends to join in.



Contact your local government or visit their website to find a park you haven't visited before or your nearest walk or cycling trail.



Book into an active school holiday program or camp run by the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries ([www.dsr.wa.gov.au/camps/holiday-camps](http://www.dsr.wa.gov.au/camps/holiday-camps)).



Visit the Trails WA website ([www.trailswa.com.au](http://www.trailswa.com.au)) and find trails to explore in local bushland.



Visit the NaturePlayWA website ([www.natureplaywa.org.au](http://www.natureplaywa.org.au)) to find useful resources designed to encourage and inspire outdoor play.



Ask your friends and family about their favourite places to go and be active.



Department of  
Local Government, Sport  
and Cultural Industries



## For more information or to obtain copies of other publications contact:

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Our whole  
community wins



# Outdoor Opportunities

How being active outdoors benefits children and adolescents

## It is more important than ever that we encourage children and adolescents to spend time outdoors by creating safe and supportive places and spaces for them to be more active.

Children and adolescents are spending less time outdoors, have less freedom to walk or cycle to destinations, and are becoming increasingly inactive – a situation often associated with increased screen use. This corresponds with concerning rates of overweight and obesity in Australian children, with physical activity levels decreasing significantly as children get older.

### How active are Australian children and adolescents?

How active do children need to be?		How active are they?
Age group	Recommended physical activity guidelines for each age group.	What percentage of children in each age group meet the recommended guidelines?
2-4 years	At least three hours per day of physical activity, with at least one hour of energetic play. <sup>1</sup>	72% of young children are active enough each day
5-12 years	At least one hour per day of moderate to vigorous physical activity. <sup>2</sup>	Only 19% (less than 1 in 5) of primary school aged children meet recommended activity guidelines
13-17 years	At least one hour per day of moderate to vigorous physical activity. <sup>2</sup>	Only 8% (less than 1 in 10) of adolescents are active for at least one hour per day

## The number of children who walk to school or the local park or shops is also declining.



are driven to school<sup>3</sup>

“Gone are the days when most children roam freely in the suburbs, play ball on the street, and populate parks after school; deserted neighbourhoods are more the norm in many of today’s modern westernised cities”<sup>4</sup>.

1 Shilton T, Grant D, Jones RA, Stanley RM, Sherring J, Hinkley T et al. A collaborative approach to adopting/adapting guidelines - The Australian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines for the early years (Birth to 5 years): an integration of physical activity, sedentary behaviour, and sleep. BMC Public.

2 Australian Government Department of Health. Australia’s physical activity and sedentary behaviour guidelines 5-12 years; and 13-17 years. Canberra: Department of Health, 2014.

3 Lindberg R, Fetherston H, Calder R, McNamara K, Knight A, Livingston M, et al. Getting Australia’s Health on Track: Priority policy actions for a healthier Australia. Victoria: Australian Health Policy Collaboration, 2016.

4 Martin KE, Wood LJ. “We Live Here Too” ... What Makes a Child-Friendly Neighbourhood? In Wellbeing: A Complete Reference Guide. John Wiley & Sons: DOI: 10.1002/9781118539415.wbwell061, 2014.

## Benefits for children and adolescents of being active outdoors

Physical activity occurs in many places, both indoors and out: at home, at school and in community recreation centres; at sports fields, parks and play spaces; at the beach, along the river and in our forests.

Being active outdoors offers immense physical and mental benefits from early childhood development through to adolescence and into our adult lives.

### ✓ Increasing physical activity and fitness

Children who spend more time outdoors tend to have better levels of fitness, and improved muscle, bone, joint, heart and lung health. Research has also linked time spent outdoors with decreased likelihood of overweight and obesity in adolescence.

Outdoor play and activity habits learned while young are more likely to be maintained, decreasing the risk of chronic illness in later life<sup>5</sup>.

### ✓ Fundamental movement skills

Children who play in natural outdoor spaces have better physical ability, balance, and coordination. Activities such as running, climbing, balancing, and catching help develop important movement skills<sup>6</sup>.

### ✓ Social skills

Outdoor activity with friends and family can help to build social confidence and provides opportunities to improve cooperation, team work, leadership and communication skills<sup>7</sup>.

### ✓ Relieving anxiety, stress and depression

Outdoor activity in natural environments can improve emotional wellbeing and reduce anxiety and depression<sup>8</sup>. Children who are active outdoors are more likely to have better self-esteem and are less likely to be socially isolated<sup>9</sup>.

### ✓ Child development and learning

Outdoor activity can assist academic development through improving attention, focus and concentration in the classroom<sup>10</sup>. Time spent in natural outdoor places encourages problem solving, lateral thinking, leadership, and a curious and creative imagination<sup>11</sup>.

### ✓ Resilience and risk management

Through outdoor activity, children learn to identify and manage risks. Lack of exposure to risk in childhood can hamper development of resilience, self-confidence, independence, and judgement skills. Lack of challenging activities can foster frustration, leading to unwanted risk-taking behaviours<sup>12</sup>.

5 Little H, Wyver S. Outdoor play: Does avoiding the risks reduce the benefits? Australian Journal of Early Childhood. 2008;33(2):33.

6 Gray C, Gibbons R, Larouche R, Sandseter E, Bienenstock A, Brussoni M, et al. What Is the Relationship between Outdoor Time and Physical Activity, Sedentary Behaviour, and Physical Fitness in Children? A Systematic Review. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health. 2015;12(6):6455.

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11 Keller S. Experiencing nature: Affective, cognitive, and evaluative development in children. In Children and Nature: Psychological, Sociocultural, and Evolutionary Investigations. 2002:117-151.

12 Little H, Wyver S, Gibson F. The influence of play context and adult attitudes on young children’s physical risk-taking during outdoor play. European Early Childhood Education Research Journal. 2011;19(1):113-31.

## Benefits for different age groups

### Pre-school (0-4years old):

Unstructured outdoor play can assist children to understand and express emotions, and develop flexibility, self-confidence, and self-awareness. Empathy and sharing with others are traits learned in early childhood through social experiences<sup>13</sup>.

Outdoor play is an important arena for the development of language, comprehension and vocabulary, and the practice of social skills, particularly cooperation and problem solving<sup>14</sup>.

### Primary years (5-12 years old):

Development of physical activity and motor skills in childhood decreases the risk of injuries as children get older<sup>15</sup>.

Independent activity for primary school children in outdoor environments can lead to improved self-belief and self-awareness<sup>16</sup>.

### Adolescents (13-17 years old):

Going to public places such as parks and outdoor spaces away from home and the school environment enables adolescents to learn to navigate their neighbourhood and become independently mobile<sup>17</sup>.

Going to places outside of home and school is important for social interaction and development of personal identity and social support networks. Places that foster a sense of belonging, and encourage participation in adventurous and challenging outdoor experiences, are often sought by young people.

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