



Physical Activity in Early Years

A Toolkit for Early Years Practitioners



Doncaster
Council



Acknowledgements

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Purpose

This guide has been produced to support early years workers in understanding the current physical activity guidelines for early years, and how they can use them to build on existing practices. With a better awareness of the guidelines, early years practitioners can improve engagement with parents and carers to encourage increased movement for this age group, in and out of early years settings.

Who is it for?

This guide is intended for early years workers, in settings that care for under fives. This includes;

- Nursery schools
- Family Hubs
- Registered child minders and nannies
- Apprentices and trainees working with early years
- Other professionals dealing with early years, who may benefit from promoting a physical activity element as part of their work.



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Section 1

The Guidelines

Adapted from the Start Active, Stay Active Chief Medical Officers' report, the UK Chief Medical Officers' Physical Activity Guidelines and the WHO guidelines on physical activity, sedentary behaviour and sleep for children under 5 years of age.
[1,2,3]



1. Department of Health. 2011. Start Active, Stay Active – A report on physical activity for health from the four home countries' Chief Medical Officers. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/start-active-stay-active-a-report-on-physical-activity-from-the-four-home-countries-chief-medical-officers>
2. World Health Organization. [2019]. Guidelines on physical activity, sedentary behaviour and sleep for children under 5 years of age. https://www.activematters.org/wp-content/uploads/pdfs/Guidelines_PA_sedentary_sleep_under_5s.pdf
3. Department of Health and Social Care. 2019. UK Chief Medical Officers' Physical Activity Guidelines. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/physical-activity-guidelines-uk-chief-medical-officers-report>

What is Physical Activity?

Physical Activity has been broadly defined by WHO [2019] as “Any bodily movement produced by skeletal muscles that requires energy expenditure” [2]. This activity occurs in different forms; active transportation such as walking to the shops, adult initiated activity such as swimming/dance/karate lessons and most of all, physically active play!

Key term: Physically active play -refers to activities which engage use of large muscle groups, such as climbing, running, catching or jumping

What are the benefits of physical activity for under 5's?

Even though the evidence base for early years is relatively new, it generally supports the conclusion that regular physical activity during the early years provides immediate and long-term benefits for physical and psychological well-being.

Physical wellbeing

- Improved motor skills
- Cardiovascular health
- Healthy bone and muscular development
- Promoting of and maintenance of healthy weight
- Improved sleep

Psychological well-being

- Improved cognitive development
- Improved social interaction including problem solving, decision making, compromise and set up of and following rules
- Build self-confidence and self-control
- Build attention span

Why the guidelines?

“It is a Key public health responsibility to provide the best conditions for under 5s to develop”[1].

Previous UK Public Health guidelines for physical activity have not included children under 5 years of age and there is concern over levels of habitual physical inactivity and sedentary behaviour among these children. The guidelines for 5-18 year olds specify a level of intensity that is not appropriate for most under-fives. Pre-school age children who can stand and walk independently need play opportunities that allow them to develop their fundamental movement skills and master their physical environment - one hour a day is not sufficient to achieve this.

Did you Know...

“Only 9% of children aged 2-4 years in England meet the Physical activity recommendations and 84% participate in less than 1hour a day of physical activity”. [4].

4. National Centre for Sport and Exercise Medicine. 2015. Physical Activity in the Early Years; Evidence briefing. http://www.ncsem-em.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/earlyyears_evidence_briefing.pdf

Classification of the early years guidelines

The stage of development can vary markedly from a newborn to a preschool aged child and even in children of the same age. To account for these variations, the guidelines have been classified as;

Those not yet able to walk unaided and;



Those able to walk unaided



Key points from the Early Years Guidelines

- It is important that physical activity is encouraged with the child's ability in mind.
- These guidelines refer to physical activity of any intensity; light, moderate or vigorous
- The guidelines are for the minimum amount of activity required to provide many health benefits. Regular participation in physical activity at a level greater than the minimum will provide greater health gains.
- Very inactive children who are not achieving the minimum guidelines should still be encouraged to engage in physical activity as this will still provide some health benefit. Once they are engaged, you can start to gradually increase the duration of activity.
- Overweight and obese under 5s will benefit from meeting the minimum guidelines even without a change in weight. Additional physical activity and reduced calorie intake will help to achieve and maintain healthy weight.
- The social and physical environments in which activity is most likely to occur, such as the home, childcare and leisure facilities, should be stimulating, fun and safe.

Examples of activities with different intensities

Moderate to vigorous: Rapid movement of the trunk from one place to another – climbing, swinging/hanging, playing games in a park with friends, riding a bike, dancing to music, running, swimming, skipping.

Light: Pottering, slow movement of trunk from one place to another – moving about, standing up, walking at slow pace.

Sedentary: Naps, TV viewing, drawing, reading.

Guideline 1: Infants who cannot yet walk unaided

Encourage a variety of movements from birth through interactive floor based play and water-based activities in a safe environment. This includes at least 30 minutes of supervised tummy time – while awake, spread throughout the day. Short and frequent is best. Infants should not be restrained for more than 1 hour at a time and discourage screen time. Use sedentary time for reading, singing and storytelling.

Examples of movements

- Reaching for and grasping objects: this can be encouraged by placing objects out of reach
- Turning the head towards stimuli
- Pulling, pushing and playing with other people
- Kicking, crawling, pulling up to standing position, creeping and then walking: these movements require use of large muscle groups and play spaces should set up to encourage these and other new movements.



Considerable expert opinion from many international sources says that it is essential that this group of children be allowed to crawl, play and roll around on the floor in the home or childcare setting. Not only are these activities safe and accessible, they also enable unrestricted movement. Furthermore, they create valuable opportunities to build social and emotional bonds with parents, siblings and other children.

Guideline 2: Toddlers and preschool children who can walk unaided*

Toddlers [12-36 months]:

Should be physically active for at least 180 minutes [3 hours] per day, spread throughout the day, including active and outdoor play. More is better.

Preschoolers [3-5 years]:

Should be physically active for at least 180 minutes [3 hours] per day, spread throughout the day, including active and outdoor play. More is better. The 180 minutes should include at least 60 [1 hour] minutes of Moderate to Vigorous Physical activity [MVPA].

*They should not be restrained for more than 1 hour at a time. Discourage sedentary screen time for 1 year olds, limit to 1 hour for the 2-5 year olds.

Examples of movements

- Moving the trunk
- More exertion than the minimal movement required to carry out simple everyday tasks such as washing, bathing and dressing. Activities range from light such as pottering, to moderate and vigorous such as crawling, jumping, running and riding.



Sample 180 minutes' physical activity day

Walking to a setting = 15 min

Setting play: [running, dancing, jumping, tidying up] = 45 min

Walking home, making a stop to play at the park/playground = 30 min

Afternoon/Evening: Swimming, = 30 minutes

Home play [dancing/action rhymes] and outdoor play [garden, etc.] = 60min

Total = 180 minutes

Once preschool children can walk by themselves, they tend to be active in frequent and sporadic sessions but at low intensity. These sessions could add up to 180 minutes of physical activity per day; however, most UK preschool children currently spend 120–150 minutes a day in physical activity, and so achieving this guideline would mean adding another 30–60 minutes per day.

The 180 minutes can be activity of any intensity for 12-36 month olds and should include at least 60 minutes of Moderate to Vigorous Physical activity for 3-5 year olds.

Physical activity for preschool children, comprises mainly of unstructured, active play and learning locomotor movements, stability and object-control skills. It is important that they have the opportunity to practice these skills in a variety of enabling environments and that they receive encouragement, regular feedback and support from adults.

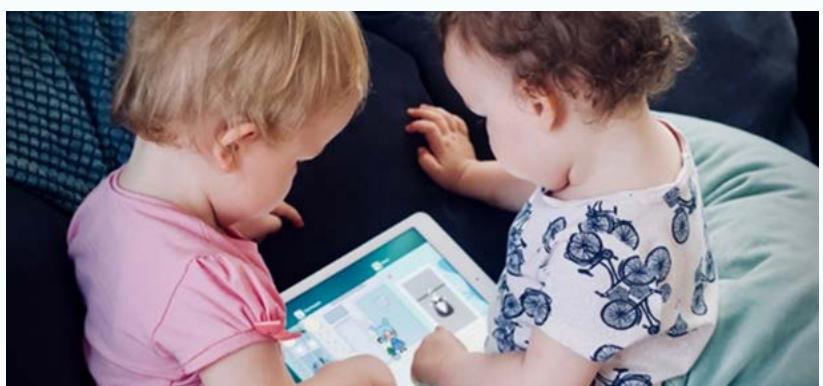
Guideline 3: All under-fives:

Should minimise the amount of time spent being sedentary [being restrained or sitting] for extended periods [except time spent sleeping].

'Sedentary behaviour refers to a group of behaviours that typically occur while seated or lying down, and which require very low levels of energy expenditure. There is evidence that under fives spend a large proportion of time being sedentary and that this is a barrier to physical activity'.

Examples of sedentary activities

- Colouring, drawing and craft
- Sitting playing with toys
- Watching TV/DVDs
- Playing non-active computer games
- Sitting listening or singing to music
- Reading or being read to
- Travelling by car, bus or train; or being strapped into a buggy. Also includes being carried while travelling



Section 2: Application of the guidelines

Section 2a - Planning activities, physical development and practical ideas



Key actions for Early Years Practitioners to apply the guidelines at settings

- Look out for opportunities and attend formal training to improve their physical activity knowledge and skills to incorporate it into daily practice
- Creating enabling environments that promote physical activity and reduce sedentary behaviour
- Provide opportunities and appropriate equipment, e.g. wellies and rain coats, to enable children to spend time outdoors regardless of the weather conditions
- Replace few long breaks with shorter more frequent breaks - where applicable
- Provide appropriate equipment to promote play -small, portable equipment, everyday objects and props
- Help and support parents in understanding the importance of physical activity both at home and away for the wellbeing of their children e.g. encourage parents/carers to utilise active travel to and from your setting.
- Create and promote parent and child activities within early years settings.

It is recommended that Early Years Practitioners are trained on physical activity and evidence shows that integrating it into settings and usual daily practice has been consistently effective.

[5]

Planning activities: The Environment

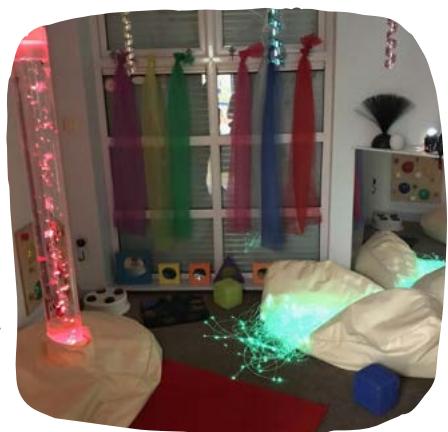
It is crucial that the play environment provided to children is safe, stimulating and attractive. This will encourage and enable children to continue learning. It is not only about the physical rooms/spaces, but the attitudes expressed by the parents/carers and early years' practitioners as well.

The play environment should be adaptable to increase the opportunities for children to be active on a regular basis. Using different surfaces, spaces, objects and sounds will help the children's development.

Consider the indoor and outdoor spaces available to make best use of the features. Scheduling is essential to check that all children get an opportunity to engage in regular physical activity.

Indoor Space: Set up differently or have different environments for babies, toddlers and preschoolers.

- Baby rooms should have plenty of stimuli, different lighting, comfortable mats to lie on, space for babies to move around and soft cushions to lie on or crawl over.
- Moving tables or using the spaces under tables can quickly create a toddler/preschooler play room
- Set up activities that link and encourage free flow between indoor and outdoor play.



Examples of indoor activities: Rolling around and soft play, songs with actions, actions and objects balloon games, gymnastics, musical chairs/statues, indoor obstacle course, throwing games, Simon says, indoor hopscotch and movement chain

5. Gordon E S, Tucker P, Burke S M, et .al. 2013. Effectiveness of physical activity interventions for preschoolers: A metaanalysis. Res Q Exerc Sport, 84:287-294. doi:1080/02701367.2013.813894

Outdoor Space: Outdoor play is usually associated with children being more active and it is a big part of their learning.

- Make the space safe for babies and non-walkers by ensuring the other children do not run around. Use of mats, cushions and changing location of the baby area will keep it interesting, safe and stimulating.
- Provide different textures and make use of nature such as sand, shingle, bark chippings and grass.
- Bridge the indoor and outdoor with a sheltered space [where possible] to allow for play in different weather conditions
- Provide a variety of easy and safe play equipment and make sure that children are appropriately dressed for outdoor play. Create a varied activity that can be rotated on a weekly basis like chasing games, climbing games, wheeled toy area.
- You could create a gardening zone



Top tip: utilise local parks, playgrounds, open spaces and walks if you have limited outdoor space at your setting [or at home for parents and carers].



Planning activities: Health and safety

Health and safety is essential in planning physical activity for 0-5s. consider the safety of the environment and the activities. A risk assessment will ensure that you have covered your bases. It involves identifying potential hazards and considering the actions that you must take to minimise the risks that these hazards may pose.

Guidance on risk assessment can be found in section 3.64 – 3.65 of the Statutory Framework for the Early years [6] and in the Health and Safety Executive [7].

6. Department for Education.2017. Statutory framework for early years foundation stage. 2017. https://www.foundationyears.org.uk/files/2017/03/EYFS_STATUTORY_FRAMEWORK_2017.pdf
7. The Health and Safety Executive. <http://www.hse.gov.uk/simple-health-safety/risk/index.htm>

Planning activities: unstructured [free] play



This is often spontaneous, innovative and creative. It comes across as

- Fun
- Flexible and adaptive
- Gives children a sense of control and free will
- Enjoyable and positive
- A popular choice for group play and,

It encourages creativity, imagination, decision making and development of overall emotional and social skills.

Top Tip: Be mindful of children who lose interest and do not let free play go on for too long as these may be excluded.

Examples: building blocks, painting on plain paper, creativity with various materials [crafts, recycled materials, etc.], playground play

Planning activities: structured play

This is usually adult led with the purpose of teaching the children a new skill.

The activities can be both physical and cognitive and encourage development of learning abilities such as;

- Focus
- Paying attention
- Taking turns
- Following instructions

Examples: Puzzles, growing a small garden or plant, 'Simon says', group activities, musical games



Planning activities: Highly structured play

This refers to adult led activities, and often takes place at set times, following a specific set of rules. These activities may need special equipment and may cost money but you can replicate some of the activities at your setting, using the equipment you have.



Top Tip – do not focus too much on structure and forget that the child still needs to enjoy the activity. the child should still be able to express themselves.



Planning Activities: Adult role modelling

Children tend to copy and will be more likely to engage in play if they see others doing so. Seeing you participate in activities will encourage them to have a go too.



- Teach the children how the activity is done and show them that it can be fun and enjoyable.
- Offering positive encouragement and acknowledgement of effort is a great way to keep the children interested.
- Using words to describe what they are doing will enhance their learning through play.

Key Issue: Communicate with Parents

Building a good rapport with parents is essential. Share information daily with parents about their child's emerging abilities [e.g., rolling over, first steps, grasping a toy] and encourage them to support physical activity at home and seek support where needed. Encourage parents to keep a physical activity progress record that they can share with other parents at the settings as a form of peer support.

Physical development of infants: 0-12 months old.

Note: Even though all children follow a similar pattern of development, each child is unique and will develop at a different rate and even the development will not progress evenly across all areas [8]. The ages here are just a guide and you should choose the activities that are best suited to each child's stage of development.

Physical development occurs both inward and outward. An infant will inwardly develop stability in the shoulders, trunk and hips, which will then allow them to outwardly move their arms and legs. Here we look at the typical movement of infants at different stages and the appropriate physical activity for them.

Birth to 2 months

- Strong rooting reflex
- Can raise head briefly and can move head from side to side
- Makes quick arm movements and can bring hands to face



2-3 months

- Shoulder muscles are stronger
- Starts to hold head up and steady
- Can hold chest up, supported by forearms during tummy time
- Supported sitting
- Can grasp and hold objects briefly.

3-4/4-6 months

- Can bring hands to midline
- Holds head steady and turns it side to side
- Able to push down on legs when feet are placed on a firm surface
- Neck muscles are stronger and can lift head easily
- Can roll over from front to back and then from back to front later
- Can be supported to stand
- Starts to briefly sit without support
- Can bring feet to mouth
- Some infants may start to crawl by 6 months



8. Cheatum B A, Hammond A A. 2000. Physical activities for improving children's learning and behaviour: A guide to sensory motor development. Human Kinetics, 20



6-9 months

- Shoulder stability is still increasing
- Further development of trunk and hip muscles
- Improved overall stability
- Can sit without support for longer periods
- Can propel forward or in a circle using toes and hands and may begin to crawl
- Can reach out and grasp objects with one hand and can transfer objects from one hand to another.
- Has developed the pincer grasp [grasps small objects between thumb and fingers].

9-12 months

- The infant's crawling or shuffling is established
- Can pull themselves up with support
- Brief moments of standing independently
- Can walk aided by handholds and adult assistance
- May start to take a couple of steps unaided
- May start to walk independently



Practical Ideas for 0-12 month olds - a variety of active movements, spread throughout the day

0-3 month olds

Tummy Time

Lots of supervised tummy time [30 minutes or more per day]: this encourages reach, push, pull, kick and twist movements and strengthens legs, arms, back and neck muscles which will be essential for moving and exploring. Start off slow with 3-5 minutes and increase as infant expresses enjoyment.



Activities

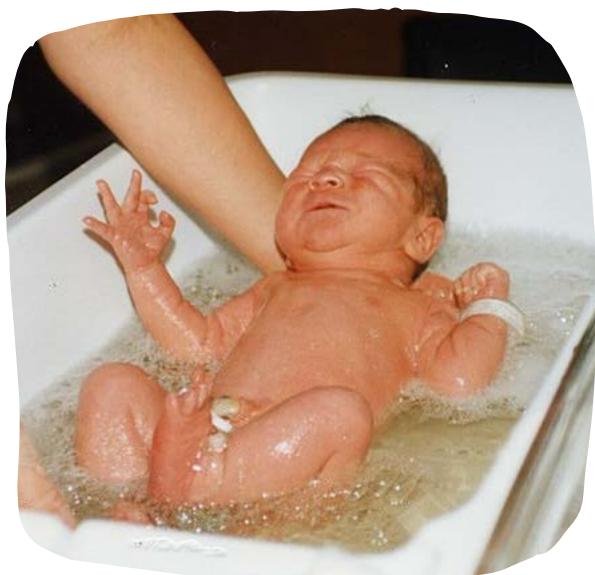
- Lie on back and place baby on their tummy facing you
- Gently sway to music while holding the baby and supporting them on their tummy
- Lie on your back and lay baby tummy down on your legs and gently move your legs up and down
- Massage baby as they lie on their tummy [visit your local family hub or speak to the health practitioners for support with baby massage]
- Slightly roll a ball or move an object in front of the baby to encourage head lifting and eye movements
- Read or sing to the baby during tummy time

Floor play

Encourage rolling as well as reach and grab as soon as you see the infant trying to do this. Provide toys of different shapes, colours and textures. This promotes balance and sensory development.

Activities

- Lay baby on back and gently lift his leg up [not too high]. Hold the other leg down and cross the lifted leg over the leg on the floor to the other side. Gently now roll the baby onto their tummy – repeat on the other side.
- Create a slight incline [can do this by placing a pillow under one end of a mattress/blanket/rug] and gently roll the baby down the incline. Change sides and repeat
- Place the baby on a blanket and gently roll them up in it and then roll them out
- Lie the baby on the floor on their back and dangle objects over to encourage head and eye movements. This may also encourage arm and leg movements later as they start to show signs of reach and grab. At this point, you could place some objects on either side of them as well.
- Finger play using songs like 'round and round the garden'
- Create a human baby swing and gently rock the baby to encourage sensory development and balance. [This is best done with a group and you can use a stretchy parachute].



Water based Play

Encourage parents to utilise water play, which promotes lots of positive movements involving the whole body by kicking, twisting and pushing. This will strengthen the child's leg, arm, neck, and back muscles.

Activities

- Bath time: make it interesting with different shaped, coloured and textured bath toys. Encourage splashing and kicking as much as possible.
- Parent and baby swim sessions: encourage splashing and kicking as much as possible.

Outdoor play [5-10 minutes daily is sufficient], with close contact and interaction.

Encourages listening, moving, head and neck control, and sensory stimulation

Activities

- Talk, sing and read to them, give them different soft toys to touch and touch them as well.
- Take baby outside and carry them or lie them down on a blanket or even on dry grass so they can look around

Top Tips

Always keep babies in the shade, away from direct sunlight.

Safety is critical so be sure to check that the surface is free of rocks, sticks or other dangerous objects.



0-3 month olds like...

- Musical and sound producing toys
- Colourful mobiles
- Teething toys
- Unbreakable mirrors
- Black and white patterns
- Rattles
- Soft textural toys and squeeze toys
- CDs with lullabies
- Nursery rhyme books



Note:

- Avoid toys with small parts that can be removed such as buttons – this will remove the risk of choking.
- Check that toys with stuffing or fillings are properly sealed or stitched and that the stuffing or fillings cannot be pulled out.
- To remove the risk of strangulation, avoid toys with strings or cords and ensure that all dangling toys are firmly tied so the baby cannot pull them down.

3-6 month olds

Floor play including tummy time

Encourages rolling, strengthening of neck, hand and leg muscles – sitting, standing, enhanced head and neck control, Sensory development, coordination and self-confidence in moving ability.

Activities

- Place the infant on your lap facing you, and holding their hands and let them push themselves up as you gently pull them to a standing position. Gently sway the infant from side to side with your full support.
- Support the infant to a sitting position on the floor between your legs facing away from you. Support their head and elbows as you bring one arm forward to reach for the opposite foot – this will stimulate coordination as well as hand and foot play.
- Place objects around them, slightly out of reach which will pick their interest and encourage rolling, reaching and grabbing.
- Teach the baby to clap their hands by modelling it while singing a catchy tune. Show them how to clap by holding their hands and helping them clap, then model it again and let them watch you and imitate you.



3-6 month olds like....

- Noisy toys
- Lots of different balls
- Moving toys
- Different colour and textured toys
- Toys that reward action by lighting up, making sounds
- Cushions, pillows, blankets
- Grasping toys
- Baby gym
- Cloth, board and picture books
- Teething toys
- Everyday household objects like pans and wooden spoons

Outdoor play

Encourages sensory development and interaction with nature.

Activities

- Get the children to sit on a rug, mat, blanket or dry grass outside and support them to sit up or let them have some floor and tummy time.
- You can also carry them so they can look around them and take in their surroundings.



6-12 month olds

Floor Play

Including tummy time, crawling, shuffling, standing, sitting, exploring. Will encourage hand and finger development, promote coordination, grasp, balance and strength development. Exploration is a major part of activity for this age group



Activities

- Place objects spaced out and at different heights around a room so they can practice reaching, grabbing and moving objects from one hand to another. Utilise different sizes, shapes, colours and textures.
- These infants can now move to music and as they can stand with support. They can push with their feet, giving them a good work out. Play some interesting children's tunes to support these movements.
- As their grasp has improved, you can give them a dedicated drawer/cupboard, where you can store their play things and encourage them to move and get them out. Change up the contents of the drawer occasionally to keep them interested
- Provide a safe clean floor where the infant can creep and crawl unrestricted. Support them in an upright position to promote balance and strength development.
- Present as much safe walk and play opportunities as possible
- Offer them rigid support so they can pull themselves up
- Let them walk barefoot indoors to help develop their foot muscles
- Playing with balls is a great way to get this group moving. Make use of various shapes, textures and sizes.



Outdoor play

Will encourage exploration, sensory development and discovery of as well as engaging with nature.

Activities

- Get the children to explore a variety of nature like grass, soil and leaves. Watch that these are not put in the mouth.
- Dry leaves and twigs as well as birds tweeting, will offer some outdoor sounds.
- Ensure that the area is safe.
- As their balance improves, introduce them to 'ride-ons' so they can sit on them and you push them along
- Make a slide for them with your legs and support them to slide down, or use a slide in a playground – place them halfway the slide and support them all the way down.
- Sit with them on a swing and gently swing or if they can sit on it unaided, let them swing alone.



Top Tips:

- Do not leave the infant unattended, instead, actively engage in the activity with them as much as possible
- Ensure that the infant's movement is not restricted by objects or clothing
- It is normal for infants to fall as they try to trot around, make sure the environment is safe. Offer a helping hand rather than using baby walkers.
- Only use proper flexible footwear [or leave feet bare] to encourage free walk and play. Rigid footwear will discourage movement.
- Do not expose the infant to direct or reflected sunlight while they are outdoors
- Keep all toys out of cribs/beds. These are meant for sleeping!



6-12 month olds like....

Stacking toys that they can build and then break – show them how to build a tower and then knock it over
Ride-on toys without pedals
Push and pull toys
Chunky wooden puzzles [inset]
Balls with different sizes, colours and textures
Bean bags
Recycled materials like cardboard boxes, magazines, newspapers, scarves
Natural objects like sand, water, rice, leaves, twigs, pebbles
Nursery rhyme books and CDs
Cloth and board books
Regular household items like pans, wooden spoons, rolling pins [check for safety]
Bubbles
Mystery baskets with different colours and textures inside
Fixed play equipment like swings, slides

Physical Development of toddlers and Preschoolers

Physically, this group starts to move faster and more easily as their legs grow and muscles strengthen. With further visual development they start to track moving objects and as they attain more balance, climbing and balancing activities are added on to their skill set. They are not yet well developed in how to manoeuvre their bodies during activity and may bump into other children or even objects.



Common characteristics of toddlers/preschoolers

- They are naturally very active
- Movement and play forms a big part of their learning
- They are learning to be independent
- They have heightened curiosity and need to explore as well as be mobile.
- They are mainly self-centred although they do start to interact with their peers.

12-18 months

- Can walk a little longer unaided but walk more with assistance
- Can venture up and down stairs by crawling
- The motor skills are more refined and can stack two objects, clap hands and can use a spoon
- Pushing, pulling, carrying and dumping things are favourites



18-24 months

- Walking is more independent but needs assistance to walk up and down stairs and on uneven surfaces. Can also be supported to stand on one foot
- Running is a part of play now and can do it quite well
- Can easily roll hand held toys with wheels
- Can start to dress themselves
- More developed grasping and pinching skills so can feed themselves

24-30 months

- With even more independent mobility, can ride four-wheeled, pedal free toys with ease
- Running is easier
- Can stand on tiptoes
- Can open doors by turning handles/knobs
- Running, climbing, jumping and chasing are favourites



30-36 months

- Motor skills are getting even more refined and can hold markers and crayons. They can stack toys with ease
- There is now a hand preference
- Can now ride pedal toys and a tricycle.
- Can run steadily on the whole foot

3-5 years

- Move more freely, rolling, slithering, crawling, walking, running, jumping, skipping, sliding and hopping
- Mount stairs, steps or climbing equipment using alternate feet
- Walk downstairs, two feet to each step while carrying a small object
- Stand momentarily on one foot when shown
- Improved running skills with ability to adjust speed, negotiate space and avoid obstacles
- Can now catch a large ball
- Improved pencil grip [no longer uses whole-hand grasp] and can steadily draw lines and circles using gross motor movements
- Can confidently manoeuvre balancing and climbing equipment
- Have increased control of objects in throwing, catching, kicking, pushing and patting



Top Tips:

- Amount of activity is more important than intensity
- Ensure that the child's physical and mental capability is considered
- Choose activities in line with the child's age and skill level
- This group have short bursts of energy and short attention spans. Properly planned activities, brief but with both unstructured and structured play are very useful
- Outdoor play is essential for this group as it offers them a great chance to explore and discover their world
- The play environment should be as unrestricted as possible but teach the children to negotiate environmental challenges e.g. the coffee/dining table, trees, raised pavements
- Provide appropriate toys for both out and indoor play. Have one or more of each item
- Encourage repetition of activities for them to master their new skills
- Give encouragement, regular feedback and support, acknowledge and assist in their efforts where necessary



Practical Ideas for 12-60 month olds: 180 minutes of varied active movements, spread throughout the day



12-36 month olds

Tummy time, rolling, crawling

Encourages: large muscle development, coordination and balance

Activities

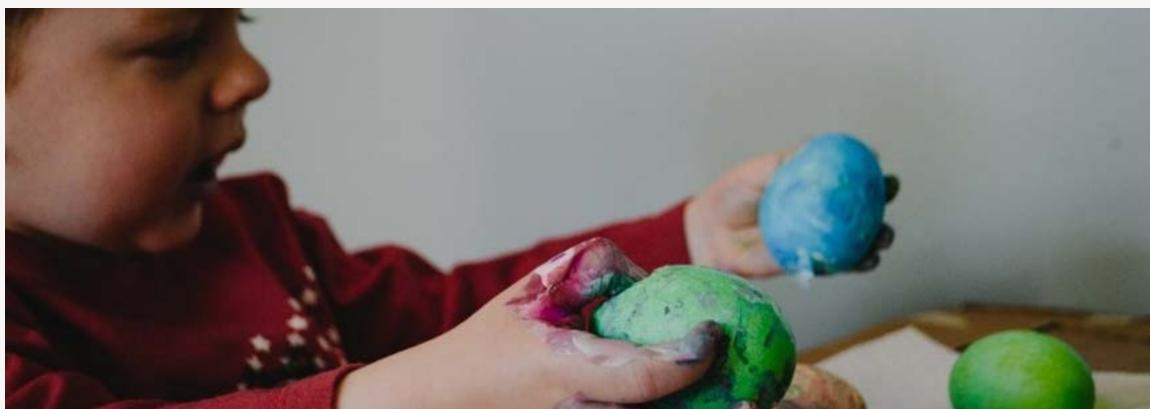
- Crawl through boxes, tunnels, under tables and chairs
- With the assistance of an adult, roll in and out of a blanket
- Lie on your tummy and use your arms and legs to make floor movements – such as movement by a worm
- Climb a ladder [upward crawl] – support the toddler fully as needed.
- Place an object in a different but visible place in the room daily and help the children to look for it. While searching, include up, down, walk, crawl, hop and jump movements.

Massage and touch – talk through it

Encourages development of hands and fingers, sensory development, coordination, balance, language and body awareness

Activities

- Finger painting
- Water play
- Playing with sand [both in sand pit and at the beach], and other textures like rice
- Play dough and slime
- Gardening and playing with dirt
- Tag of war with lycra for some stretch.
- Encourage parents to engage children in chores like; setting the table and clearing away after meal times, loading and emptying the washing machine, dressing up themselves and carrying shopping.
- Get the children to tidy up after indoor and outdoor play including sorting and returning to correct storage areas.



Walking, running, jumping, dancing

Encourages balance, coordination and muscle development

Activities

- Stop to pick up objects
- Bend and straighten knees
- Walk barefoot over different surfaces both indoor and outdoor
- Walk up and down the stairs
- Chasing a ball or a person around objects like trees, chairs, poles
- Support to walk on raised surfaces, and to jump off or over heights
- Dance and jump to music
- Go on longer nature walks as they get older
- Mark out a circle or circles on the floor, or just make a circle with the children. This is an opportunity to practice number recognition as you can count as the children march around, jump in and out of or walk around the circle(s). you could also use rhymes like 1,2,3,4,5 once I caught a fish alive, 1,2 buckle my shoe.
- Put together child sized musical instruments [can use pretend ones] or just some old pots and pans and wooden sticks. Bring out some small scarves to wave and hats to wear. Play some lively tunes and encourage the children to walk, march, jump and dance and make their own music with the toys. This is a great activity for both in and out door play.

Catching, kicking, throwing, chasing

Encourages: coordination, balance, social skills development and confidence in own physical abilities.

Activities

- Tie a balloon to a chair or door and kick it about
- Chase balloons around a room and throw them up and try to catch them or bounce them up and down not letting them fall [depending on child's ability]
- Blow bubbles upward and encourage children to watch, chase, and catch bubbles. If bubbles land on ground, encourage children to stomp on them.
- Stack up boxes or blocks and kick them down
- Practice throwing balls into a basket/bucket/bowl
- Kick a football about with an adult or some friends
- Sit across from the child or in a circle if more than one child. Combine words with play – “here comes the ball” throw it to a child and encourage them to catch and then throw it back or to another child. Depending on the skill levels, you could roll a large ball instead of throwing. Vary the size of ball with skill levels of the group or child.





Using the Environment

Encourages: sensory development and engaging with nature

Activities

- Take a walk around the park, walk over different surfaces like hills, soil, pebbles and sand
- Splash and jump in muddy puddles
- Enjoy some water play outdoor on a hot day
- Go on a nature walk and collect some items
- Collect snow or sand in a bucket

Songs, stories, rhymes, finger plays

Encourage coordination, balance and language development

Activities

- Pick out tunes that describe actions and do them with the children, e.g. 'Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes', 'Row, Row, Row Your Boat', 'Old MacDonald', 'Wheels on the Bus', 'Wind the bobbin', 'If You're Happy and You Know It'.
- Observe and vary actions and movements as the children's skills develop.
- The movements could include standing with legs apart, stamping, bending the knees, moving the waist, jumping up and down and sitting and standing up.
- Use story times as an opportunity for them to act out movements in the story. For example, sway like a tree or hop like a bunny. Give the children freedom to move in their own ways.



12-36 month olds like.....

Scarves
Bubble mixture
Playground markings [can use chalk sticks to mark the ground or sticks if soft ground]
Wheeled vehicles including ride-ons and balance bikes, scooters, trikes and buggies
Fixed play equipment like climbing frames, swings
Natural resources like logs, soil, leaves, twigs, tree stumps, stepping stones
Ribbons, scarves and lycra [for pulling games]
Ball pool
Paddling pool
Variety of balls with different sizes, colours and textures
Everyday household items like pans, pots, plastic containers, wooden spoons, tea towels
Musical instruments
Action rhymes CDs, nursery rhymes and story books that encourage movement
Construction materials like building blocks, blankets, pegs, card boxes, buckets, sand
Tunnels
Messy play materials
Pillows/cushions

36-60 months [3-5s]

Focus is on physically active play - encouraging whole body movements

Chasing, running and catching games: suitable for larger spaces or outdoors.

- Corner game: place four different colours, one in each corner of the room/space and the children run to the corresponding corner when that colour is called out.
- Beans game: get all the children in a suitable space, you or one of the children can call out different beans and you all do the actions, e.g. jumping bean – jump up and down, runner bean – run on the spot or in a circle, beans on toast – lie down, jelly bean – shake and wobble around, string bean – stand up tall and reach up high. Add more beans for older children e.g. chilli bean – shiver and shake, bean sprouts – stand on tiptoes and make yourself as tall as possible.
- Traffic lights: children stand in a suitable space, when ‘green light’ is called the children run around the activity area. When ‘red light’ is called out everyone stops still. When ‘yellow light’ is called out, children walk around on tiptoes.
- Rough and tumble play: this is a typical activity for children at this age. It involves fighting, wrestling and falling. It is essential that children enjoy themselves and not get hurt so an adult should closely supervise this play and intervene as necessary. This play will help the children to learn and experiment with parameters of acceptable physical behaviour.
- Tag: this can be played in different ways. The children can chase each other around and tap [tag] each other, or you can tuck a scarf into the waistband and let the child chase you around. Let them pull the tag out when they catch you.
- Games on line markings: like hopscotch, follow the leader, walking the line.

Obstacle courses, treasure hunts

- Set up courses which encourage a variety of movements like tummy time, crawl, roll, climb, jump.
- Design treasure hunts that utilise both indoor and outdoor on the same hunt and include a variation of movements.



Water play

- In warm weather, take the children to outdoor water play areas [fountains, splash parks, paddling pools]
- Engage in structured swimming activities like swimming lessons or parent and child swim sessions

Role play and imaginative play

- Let children create their own imaginative stories and act them out. They can pretend that the equipment available is something else.
- Use the children's favourite story books and get them to act out the different characters



Wheeled toy activities

- In a suitable space, set up routes using lines on the ground or make markings using chalk and get the children to ride on wheeled toys, keeping within marked routes
- Provide a variety of wheeled toys like bikes, trikes, scooters, wheelbarrows, balancing bikes

Musical activities, action stories and rhymes

- Encourage the children to pick out their favourite rhymes and act them out as they sing. This can be done for story books as well
- Play different types of music to which the children can dance and move. You can play musical games like musical statues, musical chairs
- 10-minute shake ups – you can order resources for these from Change 4 Life.



Jumping and hopping, climbing, hanging and swinging

- Jumping in and out of hoops laid on the ground. Try different ways of jumping – hopping, leaping, jumping
- Jumping onto, over and around spots
- Jumping over or jumping from a raised object/surface such as a step or box, or jumping into – such as into the sand pit, the pool.
- Let children climb onto, hang and swing from fixed play equipment



Balancing activities

- Balancing on one foot, on tip toes
- Balancing on their hands
- Balancing body movements when walking a straight line, walking on balancing play equipment in the playground, jumping in bouncy castles or on trampolines
- Holding varied positions in musical statues



Ball activities: use a variety of ball play

- Throwing and catching games
- Kicking and striking games
- Rolling and retrieving
- Bouncing

Activities for developing fine motor skills: Even though these activities may not be so active, they are important to the development of children's fine motor skills.

- Threading – use toy needles and soft, light materials like craft foam.
- Posting – Make posting boxes they can post paper through. Make it challenging by varying the size of the slits.
- Pegging – Use a variety of different sized pegboards for children to place pegs in holes.
- Chunky wooden puzzles.
- Mark making – give the children freedom to mark with different tools like pencils, markers, paint using paint brushes or fingers.
- Cutting – Offer children the chance to pick from a range of scissors: ordinary, pinking shears, wavy and other designs.
- Patterned blades and lots of different paper, card and materials to cut up.
- Glue sticks – Children can stick a variety of different materials to create collages.
- Tearing – Children can tear up different types of paper, e.g., tissue, coloured, newspaper, tin foil.
- Moulding – Children can mould play dough, clay or Plasticine with their hands or plastic tools.
- Baking (making dough)
- Hammering using light plastic tools



Regular everyday activities

- Gardening: encourage children to look after their own garden by providing a grow bag or a small piece of ground in the garden. They will enjoy handling the mud, watering their plants and if it is a vegetable, they will enjoy the harvesting and preparation as well as the eating.
- Tidying up: putting toys away after indoor and outdoor play, sorting the items to put each in the right place, setting the table and clearing away after meal times
- Household chores: loading and emptying the washing machine/dish washer, putting away the folded laundry, making up the bed with an adult, wiping surfaces with a clean cloth.
- Self-care activities: dressing, buttoning, putting on and taking off shoes.
- Active travel: walking to the Family Hub, local park, library. Use high visibility jackets and wrist leads for safety
- Independent activities: Encourage children to change their shoes, fasten their buttons, put on and take off their coat and hang it on a peg themselves. Be close by to help if a child is having difficulty, and demonstrate and support them if necessary.

'I can do' challenges:

- Set up a space with different items/equipment and let the children say what they can do with them. Provide simple instructions and prompt the children to vary what they can do with each item.
- Balls – I can throw it up, I can kick it high, I can catch it and roll it, I can strike it and I can stop it
- Wheeled toys – I can ride the scooter round
- Balance – I can stand on one leg, I can stand on my tip toes
- Jumping – I can jump from side to side

36-60 month olds like...

Markers: Line markings, shapes, colours, vehicle routes, lines, hopscotch, numbers, letters,
Chalk
Scarves, ribbons on sticks, streamers, paper wands, cardboard tubes, lycra
Kites, parachutes
Obstacle courses, Soft play equipment
Treasure hunts – picture clues, objects to hide. Activity trails
Bubble mixture
Wheeled vehicles – balance bikes, ride ons, trikes, scooters, buggies, wheelbarrows
Fixed play equipment – climbing frames, swings, slides
Natural resources – wood stumps, logs, planks, stepping stones, leaves, twigs, pine cones, conkers, pebbles, shells, sand, water, soil. Ball pool, Paddling pool
Role play dressing up and props
Balls of various sizes and textures, balls with bells
Every day household objects – saucepans, pots, containers, spoons, whisks, baking, objects, cloths, pegs. Musical instruments, nursery rhyme books, CD player and music
Story books which encourage movement
Stilts, Skipping ropes, Steps, benches, sturdy boxes, Target practice buckets, baskets, bins
Construction materials: wooden blocks, pegs, blankets, cardboard boxes, buckets, sand
Tunnels, hoops, carpet squares
Messy play materials – scissors, glue, play dough, clay, plasticine, paint, water, sand
Posting boxes, Threading activities, Pegging activities

Section 2b - Engaging Parents and Carers



'While we live in an environment where parents are frightened to let children go, to experience the outside world, to explore, we in our early years programme, have a duty to balance this fear by giving children freedom and opportunity to learn for themselves'. Bruce [2012]

Introduction

Parents and carers have a strong influence on opportunities for physical activity in the early years.

- They dictate most of the child's activities such as mealtime, bedtime and where the child can play and what they can play with. It is essential to consider the knowledge and attitudes of parents and carers when promoting physical activity in this age group.
- In addition to this, you should consider the equipment used to facilitate physical activity and the types of activities availed at early years settings versus those available at home.
- Because most children will spend the major part of their lives in the home environment, it is likely that supporting parents and carers in knowing and applying the early years physical activity guidelines at home will be effective in increasing movement of under-fives.

Actively engaging parents and carers will ensure that children get adequate opportunities for physical activity at home.



How can we engage parents and carers in increasing under-fives physical activity?

1. ASK

- Engage the parents and carers to identify the needs and challenges which are affecting provision of opportunities for physical activity. This will help you to understand the challenges that may hinder attendance of and or participation in activities and those that contribute to the child's inactivity. common challenges include; concerns about childcare during education/training sessions, busy work schedules, the cost of highly structured activities and limited space and equipment at home.
- Consult parents and carers before starting any activities for either them or their children and identify what motivates them to attend. Focus on their expectations.



2. ASSIST

- Make parents and carers aware of the current guidelines for physical activity for under-fives. Highlight the importance of being physically active and the negative effects of too much sitting. Share the concern that children in the early years who spend most of their waking time seated or restrained are missing out on various opportunities to be active. Use a variety of formats from trusted sources such as leaflets from Public Health England, or include the key messages as an item in parenting classes.
- Avail information in multiple languages as appropriate, and at appropriate reading levels for the target users.
- Focus on fewer, simpler key messages, rather than giving too much information. Use simple language like play, but keep the focus of the key messages.
- Discuss the different types of play with parents and point out which activities count as active: often parents and carers may report sufficient physical activity, when the reality is that many of the activities referred to are sedentary in nature. Support them in planning activities that balance sedentary activities with energetic activities. Work with them during sessions by giving them practical examples of how to use their home settings to meet the minimum guidelines. Encourage them to bring in evidence of what the children have been doing at home to share in-session, and offer extra support where necessary
- Offer practical solutions to identified challenges, for example, provision of childcare at education sessions or child friendly sessions and venues.
- Encourage parents and carers to act as role models for their children: when promoting physical activity, address any factors affecting their participation. Parents and carers beliefs about physical activity may have a significant impact and it will help to provide them with information that positively influences these beliefs.

3. ACT

- Create an information display and/or folder, whichever is appropriate for your setting, highlighting the benefits of physical activity. This can include peer experiences, real examples of what physical activity looks like at different stages of development, explaining the benefits of each set of activities.
- Suggest practical ways in which children can meet the physical activity guidelines, for example, by encouraging parents and carers to take them to outdoor and indoor playgrounds and to practice active travel over short distances. Signpost any relevant events and venues to contribute to variety in activities. Demonstrate activities and explain information in leaflets to parents and carers during sessions, when they collect their children from the setting or at family visits where applicable.
- Motivate parents and carers to take a closer look at the types of physical activities their children are taking part in. For example, ask them to compare activities like drawing and colouring versus dancing or chasing bubbles - in the same space.



Parents and carers have a responsibility to:

- Look out for and organise opportunities to be active with their child
- Provide an environment both at home and away with plenty of opportunities to be active
- Participate in physical activity with their child on a daily basis, especially outdoors.
- dress their child appropriately to facilitate free play and provide outdoor clothing as well when they send their child to a setting
- Encourage children to engage in active travel like walking to shops, the park and to the setting, rather than travel by car, public transport or pushchair
- Minimise the amount of time children spend watching television or using a computer/tablet/other handheld devices.
- Only restrain children in pushchairs, highchairs and other similar equipment when necessary.
- Seek advice from early years settings about ways to promote their child's physical activity and reduce sedentary behaviour.

Top tips for parents and carers to increase outdoor play

1. Organise outdoor play dates for your children to different areas including parks, and let children know that it is okay to get wet, dirty and messy! Arrange a picnic dinner at the park or playground.
2. Let the children utilise natural resources for play equipment like jumping off tree stumps, climbing on boulders, sand, gravel and logs. This will encourage their imagination and exploration.
3. Facilitate the children's outdoor play at home by providing play tools like balls, chalk, buckets and string and let them get creative. Get out with the children whenever possible and participate in play. Give them rope, sheets and sticks to build dens and forts outside for imaginative play.
4. Explore nature with the children by helping them to plant a vegetable or flower garden. Use holidays as an opportunity to explore nature and take advantage of raised land areas, lakes and riversstreams. Lakeside area is a great place to explore both playing on the hill and walking around the lake.
5. Encourage active travel by parking a few minutes away from a setting and walking the rest of the way, take the child out of the pushchair or buggy to walk part of the way, or walk all the way if possible - based on your child's ability. Give the journey some extra time so the children can play along the way
6. Make use of trails and bike paths through parks, play grounds and around the lake at lakeside, and go for regular walks or runs with the children.
7. Make an effort to explore as much of Doncaster [and surrounding areas] as possible. You can find some ideas in the 'Doncaster 100 things to do before you are 11' - www.visitdoncaster.com/100-things
8. Encourage outdoor play as long as it is safe, even in wet or snow conditions.



Useful Resources

Change for life, [2019]. <https://www.nhs.uk/change4life/activities>

NHS start 4 life, toddler activities. <https://www.nhs.uk/start4life>

Sport New Zealand, 2019. Active Movement Activity Guides for Children 0-5 years.
<https://sportnz.org.nz/managing-sport/search-for-a-resource/guides/active-movement-activity-guides-for-children-0-5-years->
*on the site, scroll down to guides and select 'Active Movement Activity Guides for Children 0-5years'

Early Education. 2012. Development matters in the Early Years Foundation Stage [EYFS]
<https://www.foundationyears.org.uk/files/2012/03/Development-Matters-FINAL-PRINT-AMENDED.pdf> [pages 22-24]

Making Play Inclusive, Sense [2019]. <https://www.sense.org.uk/get-support/information-and-advice/support-for-children/play-toolkits/>

Department of Health.2011. Start Active, Stay Active – A report on physical activity for health from the four home countries' Chief Medical Officers. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/start-active-stay-active-a-report-on-physical-activity-from-the-four-home-countries-chief-medical-officers>

World Health Organization. [2019] . Guidelines on physical activity, sedentary behaviour and sleep for children under 5 years of age. https://www.activematters.org/wp-content/uploads/pdfs/Guidelines_PA_sedentary_sleep_under_5s.pdf

Department of Health and Social Care. 2019. UK Chief Medical Officers' Physical Activity Guidelines. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/physical-activity-guidelines-uk-chief-medical-officers-report>

Section 3: Maintaining Appropriate Physical Activity Provision

It is essential for every early years setting to monitor their physical activity provision on a regular basis, so as to ensure its continued appropriateness and sustainability. This can be done through setting up a physical activity policy, and creating a self-audit physical activity checklist.

Developing a Physical Activity Policy

Why have a physical activity policy?

There is evidence to support the role of physical activity for early years in health, growth and development and by having a physical activity policy at your setting;

- You will have your statement of intent in writing about how you will contribute to improving movement among 0-5s
- A policy will give you an opportunity to demonstrate your formal commitment to the health of young children in your care and your community
- It will help you to create and document your physical activity goals, and also show clear direction and steps to achieve these goals
- It offers a basis of consultation with stakeholders [staff, parents, carers, e.t.c] increasing the chances of it being well received
- It will complement other existing policies at the setting, such as the health and safety policy and the infant feeding policy
- It will give more recognition to existing positive physical activity practices for early years.

Policy set up guidelines

For the policy to be successful, staff, parents/carers and children will have to be involved in its set up.

- Inform and consult the workforce, parents, carers and children where applicable
- Identify the setting's physical activity needs
- Develop the policy: base the policy on the results of your consultations, distribute the draft to the consultation group and incorporate their feedback into the final policy
- Notify workforce and parents/carers of policy launch date
- Monitor and review the policy after 3 months, and then continue review annually, making necessary adjustments.

*Your physical activity policy must include specific rules for outdoor play. *

Settings' Self-Audit: Physical Activity Provision Checklist

Does your setting have the following?

| | Yes | No | Notes |
|--|-----|----|-------|
| A champion – person designated to look after physical activity | | | |
| A written policy that guides how your setting implements physical activity | | | |
| An understanding of the UK Chief Medical Officers' Physical Activity Guidelines for Early Years | | | |
| An audit/evaluation of current provision to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify what opportunities children have for physical activity and utilise appropriate equipment for purposeful play• Identify sedentary periods during the day which can be reduced to increase physical activity opportunities• Increase the number of bouts of physical activity in each day | | | |
| A range of positive environments (indoors and outdoors) for free play that promote physical activity | | | |
| A range of positive activities that stimulate more physical activity | | | |
| Flexibility to make changes to spaces? | | | |
| If no, what are barriers to making changes? | | | |
| An active travel statement/policy to encourage children and their parents/carers to add more physical activity into their daily lives | | | |
| Good communication and engagements with parents to raise awareness of the importance of children being more active each day | | | |
| Actively engaged with the Healthy Learning Healthy Lives (HLHL)? | | | |