



Playing actively
in and around the home

Playing helps children explore, learn about their world and feel happy. Also, being up and about and playing burns energy and helps prevent serious illnesses like Type 2 diabetes, heart disease and cancer in later life.

Making sure there is time, space and freedom to play is a great way of making sure everyone is moving around and having fun!

The onset of Covid-19 has hit us hard. Parents and carers are facing a worrying time as schools and activities that normally keep their children active are closed. Despite this new stress, children will still want and need to play. Until the threat of illness passes, playing will need to be mostly inside or if outside, following the most up to date [Welsh Government](#) and [Public Health Wales](#) guidance around social distancing.

The importance of play in times of stress

During times of uncertainty, playing:

- helps children recover a sense of normality and joy during an experience of loss, isolation and trauma
- helps children to overcome emotional pain and regain control over their lives
- helps children make meaning of what has happened to them, and enable them to experience fun and enjoyment
- offers children an opportunity to explore their own creativity.

The physical activity guidelines

The four UK Chief Medical Officers' physical activity guidelines recognise the importance of play for children's development. The guidelines recommend that children should have as much active play as possible.

The guidelines state: '*children are recommended to be active for an average of 60 minutes a day across the week.*' The overall message is any activity is better than none, and more is better still.

Modern life has made things comfortable for us and many of us spend a long time in sedentary activity that doesn't burn off the energy we are consuming.

During these changing times, it is important that we find time in the day to get up and about. Inactive children are at risk of storing excess fat in their bodies – just like their parents.

Guidelines on physical activity recommendations for children aged 5 to 18 years:

- All children should engage in moderate to vigorous intensity physical activity (MVPA) for at least 60 minutes per day across the week.
- Children should engage in a variety of types and intensities of physical activity across the week to develop movement skills, muscular fitness, and bone strength.
- Children should aim to minimise the amount of time spent being sedentary, and when possible should break up long periods of not moving with at least light physical activity.

Making sense of the guidelines

- Moderate intensity physical activities, such as cycling, make us warmer, breathe harder, and our heart beats faster, while still being able to talk.
- Vigorous activities, such as running fast, playing tag and scooting, have similar but greater effects, and make talking much harder.
- Muscle- and bone-strengthening activities such as hopping, skipping, and swinging involve using body weight or working against resistance.
- Sedentary behaviour is activity with very low energy expenditure, primarily sitting or lying down. Sedentary activity includes screen-time (watching television, computer use, video games), sitting to read, talk, do homework, or listen to music.

Active play

Active play is physical activity with regular bursts of a moderate to vigorous pace, such as crawling, jumping, or running. Playing actively raises children's heart rate and makes them 'huff and puff'.

Ensuring children are active when being asked to socially distance

Social distancing requires everyone – children and adults – to stay six feet (two metres) apart at all times. So, being outdoors is still possible. But, it's necessary to think about places where it is easier to keep the recommended distance from those not in our household. It is suggested that we can go on walks through neighbourhoods, bike rides and scooter rides.

It is very difficult for children to self-regulate when they are playing, particularly when they are engaged in vigorous physical activity or there are other children nearby, so they may need our help with this.



Play ideas for parents

Whilst we are all required to follow social distancing guidelines, it is still possible to spend time outdoors. But, we need to make choices that make it easier to keep our distance.

It is very difficult for children to self-regulate when they are playing, particularly when they are engaged in active play or there are other children nearby, so they may need our help with this.

Preparing and gathering a selection of play items to take into the garden or along to outdoor spaces may help to keep it interesting. Simple play items such as balls, ropes, hoops, chalk, small toys like cars and animals can make it easier for children to have fun.

When we can, and if we feel well enough to, we should do our best to encourage outdoor play, regardless of the weather. See these [ideas for playing outside in all weathers](#) for inspiration.

Playing actively indoors

The home is a great place for playing. Children can make creative use of even just the corner of a room if they have a few toys or other bits and pieces and freedom to play.

There's lots of fun ideas that don't require much room, including old favourites like hide and seek or [building a den out of cushions and blankets](#). Older children still need room and space to play inside too – children need to [rough and tumble](#) as part of their play. See our [indoor play blog](#) for some suggestions and these [top tips for playful parenting](#) might also be helpful.

Teenagers will find social distancing and social isolating particularly difficult. Many older children will have been looking forward to spring, its lighter evenings and milder weather as a time to meet up with friends. For many, who may have the freedom to play out independently with their friends for the first time, this was to be a milestone they now need to wait for.

Focusing on play ideas without rules or that don't need a specific skill are fun for family members of all ages and will help pass the time in a playful way. These sorts of activities will also provide fun and security during an experience of loss and isolation.

Being well

Playing is the most natural and enjoyable way for children to be active, keep well and be happy. Parents and carers can find simple ways to include time and space for playing in their children's daily lives. All kinds of play can help children to be more active.

[Playing together](#) is a great way to spend time as a family and help develop children's confidence and communication skills. It can also help parents and other family members stay active too and it will contribute to improved well-being for everyone during times of uncertainty.

Some simple and silly ideas

Treasure Hunts

Treasure hunts are great to keep kids busy and active around the home. If you want to start small, have a mini hunt. Use a small box and get everyone playing to find and fill the box with as many weird and unusual items as possible.

Or, find a rainbow around the house – asking participants to find items from every colour of the rainbow or assigning each child different colours.

To help with clearing up, swap items so that others return the items to their place.

Zoo or jungle parade

Show one another:

- Walking like an elephant
- Waddling like a duck
- Hopping like a kangaroo
- Slithering like a snake
- Climbing like a monkey.

Think of more – how do giraffes, bears, snails, frogs, birds and cats move?

Balance Beam

Use a taped line on the floor or a bit of rope to walk along and practice balance.

Balloon Tennis

Using paper plates as the rackets, how long can you keep the balloon off the floor. Great for individual or group activity.

If you can get outside, fill the balloon with water and use your hands! If you don't have balloons, try with rolled-up socks.

Sock Basketball

Toss the rolled-up socks into a bucket, laundry basket, shopping bag or shoe box.

Daytime Disco

Put on music and dance. You can also play freeze dance. Every time the music stops, everyone stands still.

Obstacle Course

Make an indoor obstacle course using cushions, pillows, small tables and hula hoops. A balance beam can be made on the floor with masking tape, rope or shoelaces tied together. The same can be used to make circles to jump in and out of.

Indoor Hopscotch

Use masking tape to mark out the hopscotch on the floor and play with a rolled-up sock as the marker. After a few days, cut bubble wrap into squares, tape together into a hopscotch grid and you have popping hopscotch!

Traditional playtime games

Think of our own playtime games to play – what about *Simon Says*, *The Floor is Lava* or *Red Light-Green Light*? Ask your children what they like to play most in the school playground and try to work out how to play it indoors.





24 March 2020

© Play Wales

www.playwales.org.uk

Play Wales is the national organisation for children's play, an independent charity supported by the Welsh Government to uphold children's right to play and to provide advice and guidance on play-related matters.

Registered charity, no. 1068926