

FAMILY WELLNESS

Enjoying Active Play for the Family

- How active play impacts bonding
- Ideas for active play
- Resources for fun



Physical activity is good for the body and brain, but how does it impact bonding and attachment?

Many families want to prioritize physical activity for its important health benefits and to help encourage children to have a healthy relationship with exercise. These are great reasons, however another noteworthy benefit of physical activity and active play is the impact that it has on bonding and attachment--a vital part of the adult/child relationship.

When children are active, their hearts are pumping and blood is flowing, often times feel-good hormones are also flooding their brains. These biological factors impact their emotional senses

as well--meaning that their brains are primed and ready for some intentional bonding time. This also helps support children who are especially sensitive to "fight or flight", because the physical activity can help keep those reactions at bay.

Pairing fun and bonding with physical activity also helps "stick" memories deep into children's brains, so that the positive experience is a lasting one.

Did you have a sports coach or someone similar who was an important adult in your life? One reason might be the opportunities you had to bond with them while your brain was in this state..



Make it Fun

Ideas to make active play and fun and regular routine

Find things everyone can take part in.

Active play will be more fun if everyone in the family feels like part of the action. This may be riding in a cart behind the bike, "wearing" little ones on hikes, or choosing sports that everyone can enjoy. Less active options--outside play, walks around the neighborhood, or inside dance parties--may also work well to get the family moving some and include everyone.

Keep the focus on togetherness.

Young children shouldn't care about calorie burning workouts. Instead of focusing on the amount of movement or exercise, put the focus on enjoying time together, playing, and having fun. The exercise should be a nice bonus of time spent together.

Make active play part of the routine.

Just like with any exercise routine, the "routine" is key. Make it a regular occurrence to do something active on Saturday mornings, on weeknights after dinner, or whatever schedule works well for your family. Children can expect and look forward to these fun and active times, and they won't be as easily forgotten.

Let the kids have ownership.

Everything is more fun when children feel like they have a say over what they are doing. Asking what they are interested in and allowing them to plan active play for the family will boost engagement and make the time more enjoyable for all.

Share how physical activity helps our bodies.

Conversations should not focus on body image, but it is helpful to discuss how physical activity helps our bodies get stronger and stay healthy. Share how moving increases heart rates, burns energy, and builds muscle. We sleep better after physical activity, too!

"Don't just tell your kids to be active and to get outside and play. Lead by example.

– SUMMER SANDERS

Resources

For active fun

- Our Child and Family Wellness Coordinator talks more about physical activity, and specifically bonding with children who have experienced trauma, in [this webinar](#).
- Visit our 5-4-3-2-1 Go!® site for family resources to support children being active for at least 1 hour a day.
- More on [bonding and physical activity](#).
- [50 ideas](#) for active family play
- [Go Noodle](#) houses a library of videos that encourage physical activity through dancing, yoga, and other fun things. Children's Hospital sponsors this content.

