

Help your child be HAPPY from joyful movement and celebrating body function

Physical activity can promote positive body image

Physical activity has many benefits for a child's wellbeing and development. It can improve:

- mood
- stress management
- bone density
- heart and lung health
- muscle development
- flexibility and co-ordination
- **body confidence - especially if the focus is on what the body can do – not how it looks.**

Many children can benefit from *more* physical activity. With more screen-time and less time playing outside children are moving less. But as they grow and develop, so do their interests, energy levels and abilities. Help your child find non-competitive activities that they can enjoy at every stage and age, and role model this yourself.

Public health messages and the fitness industry often encourage physical activity to control, change or reduce weight or change body shape. Sadly, this only reinforces narrow and unhelpful body and health ideals.

Fun physical activity improves body image. But also, the happier a person is with their body, the more active they are likely to be.

Tell your child about the many benefits of moving, and that healthy, fit bodies come in a range of shapes and sizes. All bodies can enjoy physical activity!

If you are concerned about how your child is (or isn't) engaging with physical activity, please visit the Body Bright ['Concerned About A Child'](#) webpage.

Tips for promoting joyful movement

Try

- ✓ Celebrating what bodies do, not how they look.
- ✓ Helping children focus on what they can do with their body and how it makes them feel.
- ✓ Directing your child to a range of non-competitive activities that make their body and mind feel good.
- ✓ Engaging in and enjoying movement for health benefits (rather than weight-loss or for changing body shape).
- ✓ Being aware fitness trackers and sports watches connect numbers and metrics to health. This can be harmful for children who are perfectionists, competitive or obsessive.
- ✓ Encouraging your child to move using all their senses.
- ✓ Reminding your child that healthy, fit bodies come in many shapes and sizes.
- ✓ Encouraging your child to listen to their body. Is it tired, sore, had enough, or does it need a bit more? Let their body be the guide!
- ✓ Reminding your child that any movement is beneficial and doesn't have to be high intensity.
- ✓ Remembering your child's interest and energy levels will change throughout childhood and adolescence (particularly during puberty).
- ✓ Ensuring your child is not over-training particularly if they do competitive sports or many different sports.

Avoid

- ✗ Forcing your child to participate in physical activity that makes them feel uncomfortable.
- ✗ Telling children physical activity should be used to change weight or body shape (e.g., get thinner/muscular).
- ✗ Using movement or physical activity to compensate or 'burn off' food.
- ✗ Rewarding movement with food (e.g., "come for a bike ride, and you can have some ice-cream").
- ✗ Encouraging only children with large bodies to engage in physical activity. ALL children benefit from joyful movement.
- ✗ Promoting physical activity at the expense of body image (e.g., suggesting they don't have the 'right' body type for some activities).
- ✗ Suggesting that running or structured sports are the best physical activity. The mind and body can benefit from differing movements and intensity levels.
- ✗ Encouraging children to 'lift weights' or start strength training (going to the gym) too early. Instead, encourage play and functional movement and activities.
- ✗ Linking strength to muscle size.

A note on uniforms:

- Ensure your child is comfortable in sports uniforms. These can be a barrier to sports and activities like dance.
- Use your parent voice to challenge non-body inclusive sports or activities (e.g., costumes, uniforms).