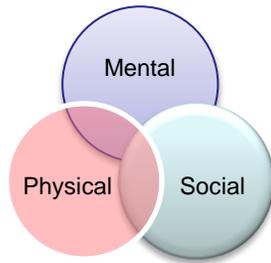


## Play Your Way to Positive Mental Health

### Health Is Not Just Physical

Mental and physical health have been seen as separate from one another. However, all parts of one's health are linked. "Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being", as defined by the World Health Organization (2009).



Physical activities contribute to mental health just as our emotions can impact physical responses. By promoting our physical health through exercise, nutrition and sleep, we can impact our mental health.

### Active Living

Being physically active is a key part of good health for all school-aged children. Physical activity is not only helpful for the body but also for the mind. Physical activity releases endorphins that improve mood. Being active can help to reduce depression and anxiety symptoms. Even 10-15 minutes of activity at a time can make a difference.

Being active can help to:

- Feel a sense of control.
- Increase energy.
- Increase self-confidence and self-esteem.
- Improve concentration.
- Improve sleep patterns.
- Have fun.



The Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology, along with other organizations, developed the **Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines for Children and Youth**. These guidelines outline how much children and youth need to sweat, step, sleep, and sit each day for optimal health. School-aged children should accumulate at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity each day. According to ParticipACTION, **only nine per cent of children get enough heart-pumping physical activity.**

### Active Living Starts at Home

Healthy habits start to develop early. Through positive interactions and deliberate learning opportunities, families can help children and youth to establish routines that enable them to develop in healthy ways.

When children and youth find an activity that's fun, they will most likely do more, get better at it, feel accomplished, and want to do it even more. Likewise, if they're pushed into activities they don't like, they're unlikely to want to participate and will end up frustrated and will feel like exercising is a chore.

### Strategies to Help Children and Youth to Stay Active

- Make physical activity part of your family's **daily routine**. From household chores to an after-dinner walk, keep your family active every day. Allow time every day for free play. Playing tag, riding bikes around the neighborhood, and building snowmen are fun and healthy activities.
- Allow for **child directed play** as much as possible—follow your child's lead during play: comment on what you see, imitate your child's actions, and do what they ask you to do. Avoid taking the lead by giving instructions or commands, teaching a new skill, or structuring the play.
- **Limit** time spent in sedentary activities, such as watching TV, being online, and playing video games.
- Keep a variety of games and sports equipment on hand. It doesn't have to be expensive.
- Expose children to a variety of activities, games and sports at an early age. And, **keep the focus on fun**.
- If your child doesn't enjoy the activity, it might be a good idea to switch to something else. **Focus on choice** and remain positive to make this transition smooth and to help your child develop a positive view of physical activity.
- Consider your child's strengths, interests, and body type when you are choosing their activities. A child's personality and temperament can also impact the success of an activity. Recognize that some children may enjoy taking risks, being competitive, or playing on teams while others may prefer solo activities, or ones that focus on control and discipline. **Encourage activities that would best suit the child.**
- Lastly, **set a good example**. Children will look to their parents and other adult role models for guidance, support, and encouragement. Show your children that physical activity, exercise and play are important to you

### What about Teenagers?

As youth get older and demands increase on their time, they may need some encouragement to stay active. Help them find activities that fit with their schedule.

And, be aware that some teens may overdo it when it comes to fitness. If your teen refuses to eat certain food groups, becomes overly concerned with body image, appears to be exercising compulsively, or has a sudden change in weight, talk with your doctor.

### Resources

- Canadian Pediatric Society: [www.cps.ca/](http://www.cps.ca/)
- Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology: [www.csep.ca/](http://www.csep.ca/)
- Kely Mental Health Resource Centre: <http://keltymentalhealth.ca/>
- KidsHealth - Staying Fit: [www.kidshealth.org](http://www.kidshealth.org)
- ParticipACTION: [www.participaction.com](http://www.participaction.com)