




Ways of promoting physical activity among children and young people

ABBREVIATED VERSION



Guidance for schools and parents

Schools

All children and young people go to school. This means that schools and the school environment are a very important arena for promoting physical activity. For example, we now know that:

The school playground is an important place for children and young people, simply because they spend so much time there. Research shows that the design of schools' recreational areas has a huge impact on how physically active children are.

Inexpensive projects can have a huge impact. Two good examples of easy-to-implement measures are marking out hopscotch grids and ensuring children have access to balls, hula hoops and skipping ropes.

Ball games, running, climbing and balancing all encourage physical activity and motor development.

Physical Education as a subject is under pressure in schools, as requirements in other areas increase. Unfortunately motor skills are not among the basic skills promoted under the "Knowledge Promotion" reform, despite the fact that Physical Education classes are often the only place many children get any all-round exercise. One important strategy is to increase the number of PE classes.

Variety is important for children and young people. Physical Education therefore needs to be as varied as possible. Skills that need developing include stamina, strength, suppleness, agility, speed, reaction time and coordination.

Getting started takes half the lesson. Studies have shown that the amount of activity in a PE class can be doubled if the teacher can get the class started as soon as the lesson begins.

The competence of the PE teacher also plays a part. A lot can be achieved by improving PE teachers' skills and knowledge.



Tip!

One very effective, inexpensive measure for schools is to have hopscotch grids and other markings that promote physical activity painted on to the tarmac in the playground. Do this before the school year starts in the autumn.

ACTIVE AND SAFE WAY TO SCHOOL

Many parents drive their children to and from school. This robs the children of the opportunity to be active on the way to and from school.

Many parents justify driving their children to school by saying the traffic is dangerous; at the same time as the roads seem so much busier precisely because so many parents are driving their children to school.

Both schools and parents through the Parents' Council Working Committee (FAU) must lobby politicians for safer school routes.

One solution is for a parent to accompany the youngest children as they walk to school. At the beginning of the new school year each autumn, schools should have informational material ready telling new parents in particular how important it is to minimise the amount they drive their children. In other areas, politicians must be involved to ensure pavements and cycle paths are built.

If the way to school seems unsafe, parents can drive their children part of the way and drop them off a little way from the school and let the children walk the last part with friends or their parents. Some municipalities have set up special drop-off points a suitable distance from the school. Everyone who drives their children to school should be informed about and encouraged to use these.

The ideal solution is for children and young people to walk or cycle to school.

MIX AND MATCH MEASURES

Research shows that the impact is greatest if several different types of measure are initiated at the same time.

- Encourage more activity in the playground
- Let children walk or cycle to school
- Increase the number of PE lessons and make any necessary changes in the PE programme
- Encourage parents to ensure more physical activity outside school
- Get the head teacher to promote the school as a physically active school

Tip!

Easy access to enough balls and other equipment for games and activity encourages more children to be active at school. Team up with the Parents' Council Working Committee (FAU) on stocking up on balls, hula hoops and skipping ropes.

Parents

Parents can encourage their children to be more active. As a parent, you can follow your child's lead and help when your child wants to start an activity.

In most countries, children are more active at the weekends than on weekdays. In Norway, it is the other way round. This means that Norwegian children are more active at school and after-school clubs and in organised extramural activities than when they are with their parents.

As a parent, you can do a lot to get your children to be more active outside school and any recreational activities they are involved in.

Going for a walk in the woods is an excellent traditional family activity. It can help to have an interesting destination, such as a cafe or hostel, or to pack a picnic or favourite snacks.

There are many indoor and outdoor games and activities that children can do on their own or with their parents. At the same time, try to limit the amount of time spent in front of the TV and computer.



COLLABORATION BETWEEN SPORTS CLUBS AND SCHOOLS

The sports movement plays an important role in ensuring physical activity for many children and young people. But the children and young people with the greatest need for physical activity are often the ones who are not involved in any form of organised sport.

One way of getting more children and young people to be more active might be to encourage schools and sports clubs to collaborate on after-school activities.

Things to remember:

- Girls are generally less active than boys
- Children become less physically active as they approach adolescence
- Children and young people whose parents have little education and low income are less physically active than others
- Children of immigrants are less active than others.

Remember that activity among children and young people is about more than just physical fitness. Physical activity ensures children and young people develop good all-round motor skills that will serve them for the rest of their lives.

Active children tend to grow up to be active adults.

Learning different types of physical activities in childhood helps you dare join in activities later in life.

The Norwegian
Directorate of Health
Department of Physical Activity
P.O. Box 7000, St. Olavs plass
Universitetsgata 2
0130 Oslo, Norway
Tel.: +47 810 200 50

You can order this booklet
from www.helsedir.no
Contact us by
email on trykksak@helsedir.no.
Please quote order number:
IS- 1595 E

This brochure can also be
downloaded as a PDF file
from www.helsedir.no

Text: Jakobsen and Amundsen
Design: Millimeterpress
Printer: BK Grafisk

October 2008



Helsedirektoratet

Norwegian Directorate for Health