

We asked children why they don't get enough exercise—here's what they said

April 6 2017, by Helen Ingle And Susan Coan



The state of play. Credit: Pexels

Getting children off the sofa, away from the TV and outside can be a challenging task for any parent, particularly in the age of increasingly sedentary and screen-focused lives.

To stay healthy, it is currently recommended that [children](#) do at least 60 minutes of moderate to [vigorous physical activity](#) daily. But this has been in decline in recent years. And now only 21% of boys and 16% of girls in England are meeting current recommendations.

This lack of activity has major implications for the health of children, including an [increased risk of obesity and diabetes](#). Research has also shown that this can impact [children's mental health and well-being](#), along with their academic performance.

Children's physical activity levels are of course influenced by a whole array of factors, including friends and family, schools and teachers, and the area they live in.

To help better understand the factors that can help or hinder the [physical activity levels](#) of children today, my colleagues and I recently [conducted a study](#) to explore the barriers UK children face when it comes to being physically active.

As part of the [research](#), we spoke to 133 children between the ages of seven and 11 in various schools in England and Wales. And discovered two main barriers for children when it comes to exercise: [screen time](#) and hectic family lifestyles. Two things that I'm sure many parents can relate to.

With this in mind, I've outlined below some ways you can overcome these obstacles and help get your children more active in the process.

1. Change the way children use screen time

Many of the children in the study reported having access to a wide range of screen options such as computers, tablets and mobile phones. And many of them talked about the addictive nature of being on screens –

saying that they can often while away hours at a [time](#).

One child told us how his normal weekend usually involves a high amount of screen time:

Normally, at weekends, I just wake up, watch TV. Then at nine in the morning I start playing video games, and when I have to come off, I just watch TV.

Then, a little while later I ask and they say "yes", and so I go back on the video games. And then when I have to come off I normally watch a movie off Netflix, off my tablet.

And then straight after that I play video games. And that's what I do. And sometimes I go to the park.

Screen time is a significant barrier for children being active, and can be addictive – but it doesn't all have to be bad news. Setting screen time limits can help regulate children's usage.

You can also encourage children to use their screens, apps and gadgets in a positive way, to help to get them moving.

This can include the use of pedometers or activity trackers, which can help to monitor and increase activity levels and track progress along the way.

2. Be a role model

Support and encouragement from family members is a really important factor in increasing children's [activity levels](#).

Our research showed that this isn't just about being able to buy

expensive equipment or driving children to after-school activities and sports clubs – it's about setting a good example of how to live an active life.

This includes reinforcing the benefits of being active, and getting children into active habits from a young age.

Getting outdoors and in nature can be a great way to get children to see the benefits of being fit and healthy. This can include visits to green spaces, parks, playgrounds, walks and cycle tracks as part of your everyday family life.

Don't let bad weather stop you either – take a raincoat and wellies and show the kids come rain or shine the outdoors is always an option.

3. Make the time

Modern-day family life can be pretty hectic, and it can often feel like a challenge to find the time and energy to be active. Our research revealed that many families could do with a bit of help and support to find ways to build [activity](#) into their lives. One child we spoke to told us how:

"I want to be more active because me and my mum used to go for three-mile runs, but for some reason she keeps forgetting, and I keep trying to remind her but she's always busy."

A few small changes to daily routines and a bit of forward planning can make all the difference.

Things like stopping off at the park on the way home from school for 15 minutes – or children walking or cycling whenever possible. Families can also find ways to be active indoors, including dancing and [active video games](#). These might sound like small changes, but taken together

they can have a big impact on children's health and well-being.

This article was originally published on [The Conversation](#). Read the [original article](#).

Provided by The Conversation

Citation: We asked children why they don't get enough exercise—here's what they said (2017, April 6) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2017-04-children-dont-exercisehere.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.