

COVID-19 physical activity guide for kids

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COVID-19 has confined families to their home with children struggling to fill the void left by regular sporting activities and outside play, but parents can take simple steps to maintain their physical activity.

With [local parks](#) and playgrounds banned from public use, parents face a

unique challenge in how they assist [children](#)'s sport-oriented progress within the confines of a small backyard or apartments in Sydney and Melbourne.

Youth sport and parenting expert, Dr. Sam Elliott, says parents must develop a set of guiding principles to help their children maintain some form of involvement in sporting activities at home if [sport participation](#) is a vital part of their normal identity and development.

"Parents seeking to create new or maintain existing sporting routines for children may wish to consider how the sudden cancellation of seasonal sport is impacting their child's emotional wellbeing."

"Anecdotal accounts suggest that children entrenched in talent pathways are in a psychological state of mourning as they begin to accept that the 2020 sporting season is compromised or even canceled. Others may be feeling lost because sport fundamentally operates as a socialization tool that promotes psychosocial wellbeing and social connectedness."

"There might even be some child-athletes who demonstrate signs of motivation and psychological burnout, especially if key events like state, national and international meets are pushed back and consequently require training regimes that are not feasible from the home setting and under social distancing principles."

Dr. Elliott says parents need to create an emotionally supportive climate by listening to children's goals and motivations, developing a plan together and repeating this process to inform their verbal encouragement and active involvement in sporting activities in the home environment.

"It is equally important to note that attempting to recreate training and sporting activities for children in place of what would 'normally' be undertaken, while well-intentioned, may not necessarily deliver

favorable outcomes."

"Research shows that children's motivation is optimally influenced by how the social environment and their individual personalities interact together. While parents may be able to re-engineer some activities (e.g. closed training skills), they cannot authentically recreate the motivational climate that children crave."

"Therefore, parents should expect indifferent levels of direction and intensity of effort toward sport within the family unit during the pandemic and should display empathy and support as a result.

Age group recommendations:

Six-12 years old

Parents can be guided by principles of deliberate, unstructured play. Creative games and challenges in the driveway, the backyard or the hallway are excellent backdrops for casual pick-up games and creative play.

This will not only appeal to most children's motivational orientations for task-focused learning, but it will also give parents the creative license to co-develop sporting games and play activities with children in their environment.

12-15 years old

Parents cannot solely rely on creative, unstructured play during the pandemic and will need to communicate with their child to see what structured activities they're seeking and what might be feasible in a given time, space and place.

Activities that have a definitive structure (e.g. challenge point, length of time, developmental objective) are important to integrate with some deliberate play as well.

For example, if a child's primary sport is Australian football and they are seeking to improve their ground ball technique, parents might be able to assist by rolling different shaped balls toward them in the backyard or in the driveway. Not only is groundball proficiency a key aspect of being a competent AFL player, but it is also something that can be facilitated by parents with little space, a variety of objects, and no required prior playing experience. It essentially has a definitive structure—in this case, an objective.

15-18 years old

Research shows that children typically reduce their involvement to solely one sporting activity in this age bracket. checking in' with children's motives and needs about sport development should be frequent.

In this case, parents may need to reorientate their role to an active supporter (as opposed to directly involved) and seek to participate as appropriate along the way. For instance, if a child-athlete is seeking to maintain aerobic endurance, they might self-determine the need to do an aerobic exercise in the driveway with the assistance of an app or virtual personal trainer.

This type of activity is an example where [parents](#) may simply wish to join in to demonstrate interest and emotional support (as well as accrue some [physical activity](#) themselves).

Child-athletes in the investment years might also be motivated to learn more about playing 'craft' and may be more interested in studying specific technical or tactical expressions of elite performance. Such

activities may help maintain attentional focus and motivation to persist rather than withdraw from sport because of future uncertainties about opportunities, formats and pathways.

Provided by Flinders University

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