



Module 02:  
PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

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This module includes the following sections:

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Physical activity has many benefits for children and youth. Physical activity can:

Emotional/Mental	Social	Physical
Improve self-esteem	Help children become part of a group or team	Improve flexibility, muscle strength, coordination and balance
Help burn off energy	Help children meet new people	Develop and improve motor skills
Build confidence	Increase family time	Reduce the risk of some health problems (e.g. diabetes, heart disease)
Relieve stress	Help children spend time with friends	Support normal growth and development
Increase enjoyment and fun	Improve social skills	Promote a healthy weight



# Key Messages

## 1.

**Physical activity can have physical, social, emotional and mental health benefits**

Being more physically active can increase energy, improve sleep, and lead to better health.

## 2.

**Start with your child's ideas**



Ask your child to list their favourite activities and anything new that they would like to try. Suggest they consider activities that they can do on their own, or with friends or family. Remember that many activities don't have to cost anything at all and don't have to be traditional exercise or sports. There is a resource sheet in the 'Tools & Resources' section with a list of many different activities your family can try.

## 3.

**Find the starting point and build on it**



Look at your child or family's starting point when deciding on a change. Remember that changes should be made gradually, and goals should be S.M.A.R.T. ones. For more information on setting S.M.A.R.T. goals, see the 'Introduction' section of this toolkit.

## 4.

**Move beyond barriers to meet goals**



Talk about what might be limiting your child from participating in physical activity and go from there. What is stopping them from trying a new sport? From riding their bike to school? A number of barriers are discussed later in this module. Remember that physical activity should be fun, not a punishment or a consequence.

## 5.

**Be a role model and play**



Model the behaviours you want to see and get out and play, walk, run, dance, etc. with your child.

# Types of Physical Activity

The three main types of activity to keep the body fit are:

## Aerobic/Endurance/ Cardio:



Any activity that makes the heart, lungs, and large muscle groups use oxygen. By repeatedly doing this type of activity, you make your heart stronger, get health benefits and are able to last longer at sports and activities. Examples include running, skating, swimming and biking.

## Flexibility:



Activities that take muscles through their full range to keep them stretched out and keep joints moving freely. Examples include stretching and doing yoga.

## Strength:



Activities that help build strong bones and muscles by making them work harder than they are used to. Examples include weight training, going across monkey bars, or using your body weight like when doing push ups.

Most activities require a combination of all three types of activity, as well as balance and agility. Examples of activities that require all three types of activity include: climbing, carrying backpacks, vacuuming, playing on a play structure, and sports.

# Barriers to Being Physically Active

There are a number of ways that a child or youth's physical activity can be affected by their mental health challenges. Listed below are some of the obstacles families in B.C. have faced with their children. In the 'Tips from Families' section of this module, you'll find some possible solutions suggested by B.C. families.

- › Difficulties socializing with other children
- › Other children refusing to include or teasing
- › Lack of interest in going outside / would rather play video games or watch T.V.
- › Lack of energy
- › Sore muscles
- › Balance and coordination problems
- › Weight gain (can make exercise more difficult)



# Tips from Families for Being Physically Active

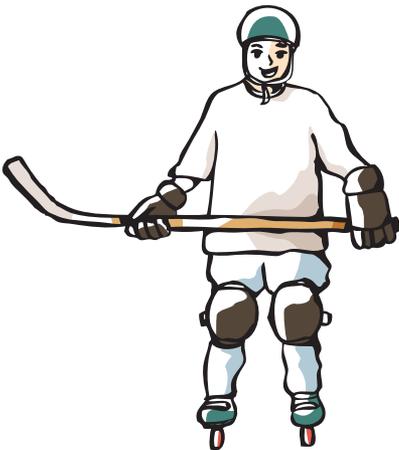
These tips have been developed by families, for families through a series of focus groups across B.C. Keep in mind that not all tips are appropriate for all families – if you have questions about a specific concern, talk to your family doctor or other health care professional.

## Building on your child's interests and strengths

- › Find a sport/ activity that fits with your child's personality or interests
- › Have your child teach you how to play a sport/ game
- › For a list of activities that your family can try, see the resource sheet in the 'Tools & Resources' section

## Supporting a child who has difficulty socializing or following rules

- › If your child is on a sports team, talk to the coach about the challenges your child experiences and give specific suggestions about how to help them (e.g. who your child should sit next to)
- › Scouting, guiding and cadets are groups that include everyone and have physical activity opportunities
- › Check to see if your community offers fitness centre orientation programs for teenagers
- › Find activities that your child can do that are non-competitive. For example:
  - Individual activities like swimming, walking, running, or biking
  - One-on-one personal training or exercise; talk to the trainer about starting small
  - Free play time in an open space. Let the equipment determine your child's play
  - Use daily tasks like going to the grocery store as a way to be active



## Encouraging activity in children and youth who prefer the computer or T.V.

- › Gradually decrease screen time by small amounts, and set time limits
- › Have your child use an exercise ball instead of a chair when they are at the computer or watching T.V. Sitting on the ball helps to strengthen core muscles and encourages good posture
- › Encourage regular movement breaks. Children can get up and stretch, run in place, walk around the house, or do another activity they enjoy for a few minutes every half hour or so
- › Wii Fit or similar games can be a starting point

### DECREASE SCREEN TIME, INCREASE ACTIVE TIME

Ask your child to think about including activities of daily living such as walking or biking to school or household chores to increase active time; all these minutes add up.

## Lack of energy

- › Start small – try short bursts of energy instead of an ‘all or nothing’ approach
- › Explain that you need to use energy to get energy

## Pain or sore muscles

- › You may need to see a health care professional to see if there is a physical reason for the pain. If there is not, reassure your child they are safe to take part in physical activity

## Weight gain makes physical activity more difficult

- › Try starting with non weight-bearing activities (e.g. stationary or road bike, water exercises, resistance training)

# Physical Activity Ideas for Your Family

## 1. Create an Obstacle Course

Obstacle courses are a great way to exercise and to develop your child's sense of touch, coordination, gross motor skills, and balance.

An obstacle course can be set up outdoors or indoors when the weather is bad. More detailed information on how to set up an obstacle course can be found in the 'Tools & Resources' section (on the *Activities Your Family Can Try* resource sheet).



## 2. Go on a Nature Walk

Make family walks around the neighbourhood or nearby parks a regular event. Try playing different games and activities while you walk. For example:

- › Play "I spy". This helps encourage children to really look around and take in their surroundings
- › Point out things. When you see something that interests you, point it out to your child
- › Take pictures and let your child take some too. Taking pictures is always a fun way to remember something
- › Tell stories while you walk. When you're out walking, there can be less distractions and your child may listen a bit better
- › Ask your child questions about trees, plants or animals that you see

*Adapted with permission from: Nature walk ideas, C.E. Higgins (2008). Family Nature Walk: 15 Fun and Interesting Ideas*





### 3. Explore Your Community Resources

Find out what activities your community has to offer. This could include community recreation centres, swimming pools, parks, or nature walks that are offered through your district. Your child may also enjoy a program or class, like dance, aerobics or martial arts.

*NOTE: Some families may encounter challenges getting their children to use community recreation centres, or their children may be unable to use them due to some previous problems at the centres – if this is the case, try out some of the other activities discussed in the toolkit.*

**For a list of many other activities your family can try, see the resource in the 'Tools & Resources' section**