



The Research File

Information for professionals from the Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute

Helping Children to Be Active

The promotion of lifelong physical activity among young people is at the heart of ten recommendations developed by the Atlanta Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. These recommendations target both school and community settings and are aimed at professionals who design and deliver physical activity programs for children.

1. Policies that Set the Tone

Establish policies that promote enjoyable, lifelong physical activity among young people—Require comprehensive, daily physical education for students in kindergarten through grade 12. Also require that physical activity instruction and programs meet the needs and interests of all students, without overemphasizing a limited set of team sports. Provide appropriate resources for more emphasis on mastery of fundamental skills, since these are essential for exercising choices for leisure-time activities across the lifespan.

2. A Safe and Supportive Environment

Provide physical and social environments that encourage and enable safe and enjoyable physical activity—Provide time within the school day for unstructured physical activity: within physical education classes, during recess, and immediately before and after school. To prevent physical activity-related injuries, ensure that spaces for physical activity meet or exceed recommended safety standards, provide developmentally appropriate activities, and provide instruction on the mechanics of specific motor skills.

3. Enjoyable Physical Education

Implement physical education curricula and instruction that emphasize enjoyable participation in physical activity and that help students develop the knowledge, attitudes, motor skills, behavioural skills, and confidence needed to adopt and maintain physically active lifestyles—Physical education should emphasize skills for lifetime physical activities such as dance, strength training, jogging, swimming, bicycling, cross-country skiing, walking,

and hiking. Testing should be a mechanism for teaching students how to apply behavioural skills such as self-assessment, goal setting, and self-monitoring.

4. Empowering Health Education

Implement health education curricula and instruction that help students develop the knowledge, attitudes, behavioural skills, and confidence needed to adopt and maintain physically active lifestyles—Knowledge of physical activity includes the physical, social, and mental health benefits of physical activity, as well as knowledge about how to be physically active. Skills such as identifying and managing barriers may help students adopt and maintain a healthy lifestyle that includes regular physical activity.

5. Extracurricular Activities for All

Provide extracurricular physical activity programs that meet the needs and interests of all students—Extracurricular programs contribute to the physical and social development of young people, and schools should extend these benefits to the greatest possible number of students. Students who are less skilled or not attracted to competitive sports could also benefit if these programs included noncompetitive lifetime physical activities such as walking, running, swimming, and bicycling.

6. Parental Involvement

Include parents in physical activity instruction and in extracurricular and community physical activity programs, and encourage them to support their children's participation in enjoyable physical activities—Parents are powerful physical activity role models for their children and play a key role in setting the psychosocial environment necessary for children's participation.

7. Personnel Training

Provide training for education, coaching, recreation, health care, and other school and community personnel that imparts the knowledge and skills needed to effectively promote enjoyable, lifelong physical activity among young people—Increase training on the fundamentals and importance of physical activity. Leaders should be able to teach longer lessons, spend more time on developing skills, impart more knowledge, and provide more moderate and vigorous physical activity.

Keep the "physical" in education!

Research confirms that children who participate in daily physical education are more fit, have better health habits, are less susceptible to stress, and perform better academically.

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8. Health Counseling

Assess physical activity patterns among young people, counsel them about physical activity, refer them to appropriate programs, and advocate for physical activity instruction and programs for young people—Health-care providers are ideally positioned to regularly assess the physical activity patterns of young people, reinforce physical activity among active young people, counsel inactive young people and refer them to programs appropriate to their needs and interests.

9. Complementary Community Programs

Provide a range of developmentally appropriate community sports and recreation programs that are attractive to all young people—Community programs complement the efforts of schools by providing children opportunities to engage in the types and levels of physical activity that may not be offered in school. Community programs should strive to meet the needs and interests of all young people.

10. Evaluation and Improvement

Regularly evaluate school and community physical activity instruction, programs, and facilities—Valid evaluations may increase support for and involvement in these programs by everyone involved. They are useful for gaining insight about the implementation and quality of physical activity policies, spaces and facilities, etc.

For More Info...

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (1997). Guidelines for school and community programs to promote lifelong physical activity among young people. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 46(RR-6), 1-36.

