



PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN CHILDREN'S PHYSICAL ACTIVITY



Introduction

Parents and family members can play an important role in supporting and influencing physical activity behaviours of children from childhood through their adolescent years. This type of support can manifest itself in a number of ways. Research has shown that parental encouragement is correlated with higher levels of physical activity in children. Parents can also play an important role in modeling appropriate physically active behaviours or providing verbal and materialistic support.³⁹ This section examines various types of parental support, in particular: the amount of time parents spend engaged in active play or sports with their child; time spent by parents transporting their child to and from physical activities and sports; whether or not the parent supervised recess or helped out at a physical activity or sport event at school during the past year; whether parents volunteered to help with their children's physical activities or sports outside of school; and whether parents provided financial support for their children's physical activities or sport participation (e.g., buying equipment, paying a membership fee, or paying for coaching or instruction). The data are examined by socio-demographic and economic indicators, including the parent's and child's age and gender, region of residence, community size, household income, education, parent's daily physical activity level, and parent's and child's sport participation. The definition of sports participation is detailed in Section A of this report and includes a coaching and a competition component. The analyses also compare trend data over time where possible. This section concludes with policy and program recommendations.

Playing active games or sports with children

Roughly one-third of parents (36%) report playing active games or sports with their children *often* or *very often*, whereas a further 32% report that they *sometimes* play active games or sports, and the remaining 32% say they *rarely* or *never* do this. Parents residing in Alberta are less likely than other parents to report playing active games or sports *often* or *very often* with their children.

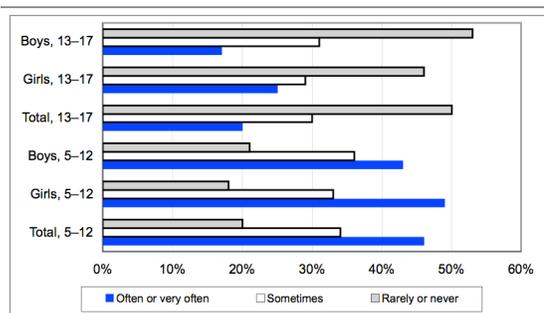
Child's age and sex It appears that parents are somewhat more likely to play active games or sports *often* or *very often* with female children than with male children. Parents of younger children are also much more likely than parents of teenagers to report doing this *often* or *very often* (46% versus 20%).

Child's participation in sport Parents who indicate that their children are sport participants are much more likely to play actively with their children than are parents of non-participants (41% versus 22%). This difference is larger if the child participates in a competitive, structured activity compared to a non-competitive and unstructured activity, and if they are coached in their activity compared to those who are not coached.

Parent's age and sex Parental age appears to be related to the degree to which parents play active games or sports with their child. Parents aged 25 to 44 are nearly twice as likely as parents aged 45 to 64 to report playing actively with their children *often* or *very often* (45% versus 24%). This is consistent with the expectation that children of younger parents would likely be younger than children of older parents and that parents of young children are more likely to play active games with their children. Within these two age groups, the gender of the parent appears to be related to playing active games or sports with children, as fathers are more likely than mothers to report doing this *often* or *very often*.

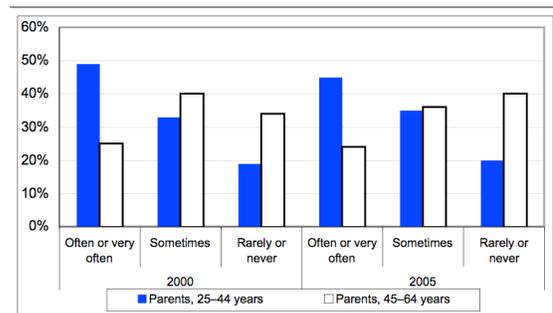
Socio-economic and demographic factors Parents who have an annual income under \$20,000 are less likely to report active playing with their children *often* or *very often*, whereas those with an annual income over \$100,000 are more likely to do so. Parents who have never been married are much more likely (49%) than other parents to report playing active games or sports *often* or *very often* with their children.

PARENTS INVOLVED IN PLAY
overall



2005 Physical Activity Monitor, CFLRI

PARENTS INVOLVED IN PLAY
trends by parent's age, 2000-2005



2000 and 2005 Physical Activity Monitor, CFLRI

Playing active games or sports with children (cont'd)

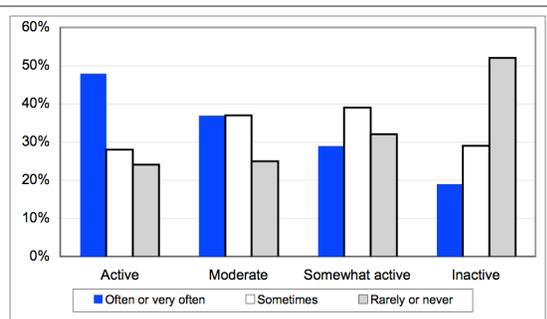
Socio-economic and demographic factors (cont'd) Although there are significant differences among varying community sizes, the differences are not clear. Parents who are full-time workers or homemakers are more likely than those who are employed on a part-time basis or are unemployed or on leave from their job to play active games or sports with their children *often* or *very often*.

Parent's activity level Parents who are the least active are significantly more likely than more active parents to report that they *rarely* or *never* play active games or sports with their children. It is therefore not surprising that these parents are also significantly less likely to report doing this *often* or *very often* (19%), compared to parents who are the most active (48%).

Parent's participation in sport Parents who participate in sport are much more likely than other parents to indicate that they play active games or sports with their children *often* or *very often*. Parents who participate in non-competitive but structured sports are less likely than those who participate competitively to report this.

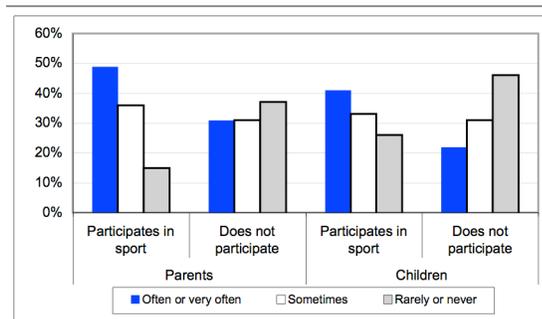
Trends Since 2000, there has been no *overall* change in the proportion of parents with children aged 5 years and older that report that they play active games or sports with their children. Furthermore, the pattern that less active parents are more likely than highly active parents to report *rarely* or *never* playing actively with their child still prevails in 2005. The decreasing pattern in playing active games and sports *often* or *very often* with their children with increasing age of the parent and increasing age of the child also remains constant over these two time periods. Interestingly, however, a new gap appears that did not appear in 2000, in that parents of girls are more likely than parents of boys to report that they *often* or *very often* play active games or sports with their child. There are also differences by marital status between 2000 and 2005. In 2000, married parents or those living in a common-law relationship were more likely than those who were widowed, divorced or separated (yet equally likely as those who were never married) to state that they *often* or *very often* play actively with their children. In 2005, however, parents who have never been married are more likely than those who are married or were previously married to report this.

**PARENTS INVOLVED IN PLAY
by parent's activity level**



2005 Physical Activity Monitor, CFLRI

**PARENTS INVOLVED IN PLAY
by child's and parent's participation in sport**



2005 Physical Activity Monitor, CFLRI

Transporting children to physical activities and sports

More than half (55%) of all Canadian parents take their children to and from places where they can be physically active *often* or *very often*. A further 26% *sometimes* do this, and about 18% *rarely* or *never* do. The likelihood of parents transporting their children to and from places where they can be physically active generally varies little across Canada, with the exception of the Territories. Parents residing in the Northwest Territories are less likely (42%) than Canadian parents in general, while those residing in the Yukon are more likely (70%), to report doing this *often* or *very often*.

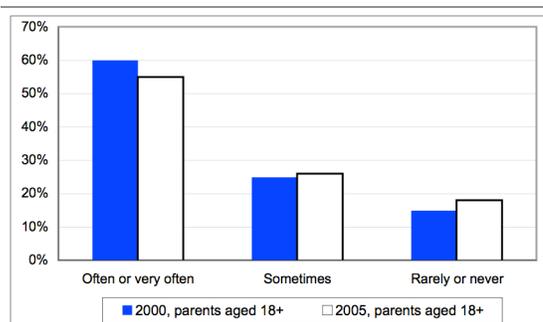
Child's age and sex Parents of female children are somewhat more likely than parents of male children to take their children to and from places where they can be physically active *often* or *very often* (59% versus 52%). Parents of younger children are also much more likely than parents of teenagers to do this (62% versus 46%).

Child's participation in sport Parents who indicate that their children participate in sport are much more likely than those who do not, to take their children to and from places where they can be physically active *often* or *very often* (67% versus 26%). Parents of children who participate in non-competitive and unstructured activities are less likely than others to transport their children to sport and physical activities *often* or *very often*. If a child is coached in their activity, parents are more likely to report transporting their children compared to those who are not coached.

Parent's age and sex Parents aged 25 to 44 are more likely than parents aged 45 to 64 to report that they *often* or *very often* transport their children to and from physical activities. In addition, mothers are more likely than fathers to report doing this.

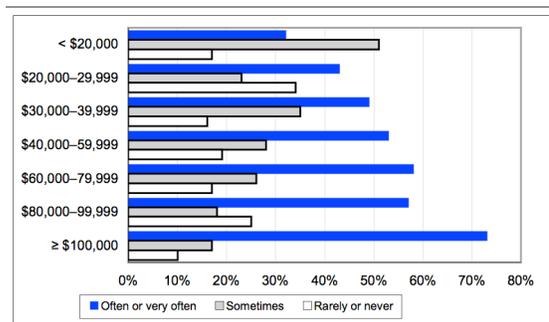
Socio-economic and demographic factors Level of education appears to be related to whether or not parents take their children to and from places where they can be physically active: parents who have attained a college or university degree are more likely than those who have a high school diploma, who in turn are more likely than those who have not completed high school, to report doing this *often* or *very often*. Annual household income is also related to parents' choice to take their children to and from places where they can be active, as parents reporting higher household incomes are more likely to report doing this *often* or *very often* compared to those with lower incomes.

PARENTS INVOLVED IN TRANSPORTATION
trends overall, 2000-2005



2000 and 2005 Physical Activity Monitor, CFLRI

PARENTS INVOLVED IN TRANSPORTATION
by income



2005 Physical Activity Monitor, CFLRI

Transporting children to physical activities and sports (cont'd)

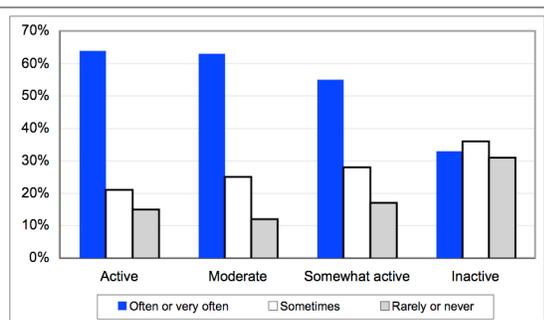
Socio-economic and demographic factors (cont'd) Parents who have never been married are more likely than other parents to report transporting their children to and from physical activities *often* or *very often*. Although there are differences with varying community sizes, the relationship is not clear. Parents who are employed on a full- or part-time basis are more likely than parents who are students, unemployed or on job leave to state that they transport their child to activities *often* or *very often*.

Parent's activity level Parents who are the least active are more likely than other parents to indicate that they *rarely* or *never* take their children to and from places where they can be physically active (31%). In contrast, parents who are highly active or moderately active are more likely to indicate that they *often* or *very often* do this.

Parent's participation in sport Parents who participate in sport are much more likely than those who do not to indicate that they take their children to and from places where they can be active *often* or *very often*.

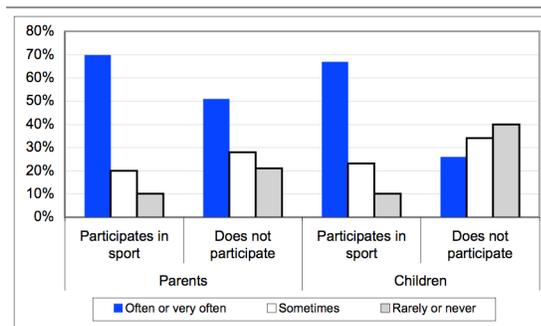
Trends In 2005, a very small decrease was observed in the proportion of parents who reported that they *often* or *very often* take their children to and from places to be physically active compared to 2000. Although there were no differences in the proportion of parents of girls compared to parents of boys who transport their children in 2000, differences appear in 2005 (where parents of girls are more likely than parents of boys to report transporting their child *often* or *very often*). The difference by parent's activity level that was observed in 2000 (where the likelihood of transporting children to and from places to be physical active increases with the activity level of parents) persists in 2005. Similarly, the increased prevalence of this type of support by parent's education and household income also continues between the two time periods.

**PARENTS INVOLVED IN TRANSPORTATION
by parent's activity level**



2005 Physical Activity Monitor, CFLRI

**PARENTS INVOLVED IN TRANSPORTATION
by child's and parent's participation in sport**



2005 Physical Activity Monitor, CFLRI

Volunteering with physical activities and sport

Just under one-quarter (21%) of parents report that they have supervised recess or helped out at a physical activity or sporting event at school during the past year. Moreover, 37% of parents report that they have volunteered to help with their children's sport or physical activities outside of school, which includes volunteering for a sport or recreation group, serving on a committee, helping at a special event or outing, and so on. Parents residing in New Brunswick, British Columbia, and the Yukon are more likely than other Canadian parents to report volunteering with sport and physical activities outside of school, whereas parents in Nova Scotia are less likely to do so. Parents living in Saskatchewan are more likely to volunteer both *at* school and *outside of* school.

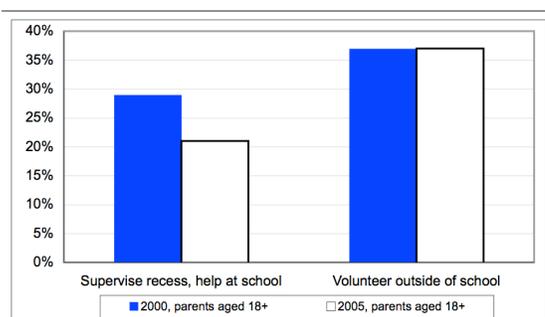
Child's age and sex Parents of younger children are more likely to report volunteering than are parents of teenagers, both at school (28% versus 13%) and outside of school (41% versus 30%). Parents of girls are more likely than parents of boys to report doing so both *at* and *outside of* school however, this gender difference is particularly apparent for parents of teens.

Child's participation in sport Parents of sport participants are about twice as likely as other parents (25% versus 12%) to report that they volunteer at school, and are about three times as likely to report volunteering outside of school (45% versus 16%). Parents of children who compete at lower levels (i.e., locally) are more likely than those who compete at higher levels (provincial and national) to volunteer at school. Similarly parents of children who use a coach are more likely to volunteer both *at* and *outside of* school, compared to those whose children do not.

Parent's age and sex Parents aged 25 to 44 are more likely than those aged 45 to 64 to volunteer at school. Mothers are more likely than fathers to volunteer both *at* and *outside of* school. Mothers aged 25 to 44 are the more likely than other parents to report volunteering *at* school; however, they are no more likely than other parents to volunteer *outside of* school.

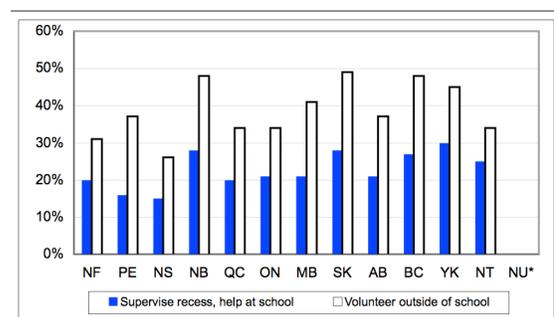
Socio-economic and demographic factors Generally speaking, parents with college or university degrees are somewhat more likely than parents with lower levels of education to report volunteering, both *at* school and *outside of* school.

PARENTS WHO VOLUNTEER
trends overall, 2000-2005



2000 and 2005 Physical Activity Monitor, CFLRI

PARENTS WHO VOLUNTEER
by jurisdiction



2005 Physical Activity Monitor, CFLRI

Volunteering with physical activities and sport (cont'd)

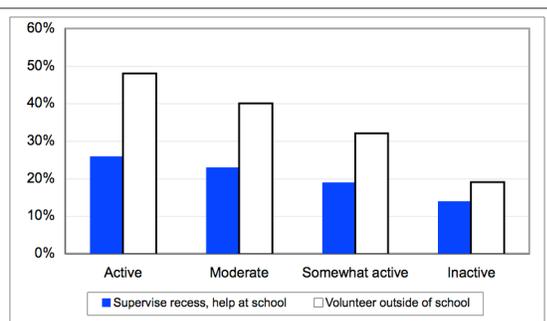
Socio-economic and demographic factors (cont'd) Parents who have never been married are significantly more likely to volunteer *outside of* school. Parental participation in volunteering is associated with community size, however, the pattern is not clear. Parents employed on a part-time basis or who are homemakers are more likely than those who are employed on a full-time basis or who are unemployed or on job leave to volunteer *at* school

Parent's activity level Parents with higher levels of activity (at least at moderate levels) are more likely than those with lower activity levels to volunteer both *at* and *outside of* school.

Parent's participation in sport Parents who participate in sport are more likely than those who do not, to indicate that they volunteer with their children's physical activities, both at school and outside of school. Parents who participate in competitive and structured activities or sports are more likely than those who participate in non-competitive sports and activities to report volunteering.

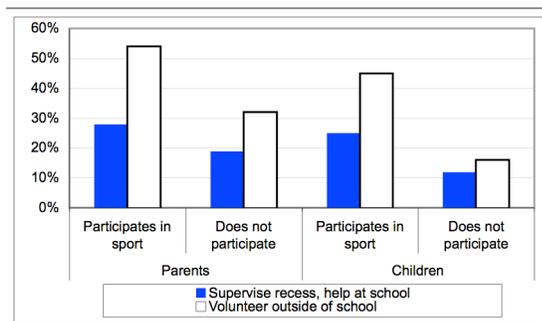
Trends Parents in 2005 are less likely to supervise recess or help out at a physical activity event at their child's school compared to 2000. In terms of volunteering in physical activity opportunities *outside of* school, there has been a very small decrease in the proportion of parents who report this. Interestingly, although mothers in general were much more likely than fathers to report volunteering at school in 2000 (14 percentage point difference), the gender gap has closed considerably (5 percentage point difference) in 2005. Parents of younger children are still more likely than parents of adolescents to volunteer both *at* school and *outside of* school as noted in 2000. Similarly, the greater likelihood of volunteering *at* and *outside of* school associated with increasing parental activity level seen in 2000 persists in 2005.

**PARENTS WHO VOLUNTEER
by parent's activity level**



2005 Physical Activity Monitor, CFLRI

**PARENTS WHO VOLUNTEER
by child's and parent's participation in sport**



2005 Physical Activity Monitor, CFLRI

Financial support of children's physical activity and sport

Three-quarters of Canadian parents report having contributed financially to their children's physical activities and sports during the previous year; this financial support might include buying equipment, paying a membership fee, or paying for coaching or instruction. Parents residing in the Northwest Territories are less likely than other parents to report that they financially support their child's physical activities and sports, whereas parents in Prince Edward Island and British Columbia are more likely to report this.

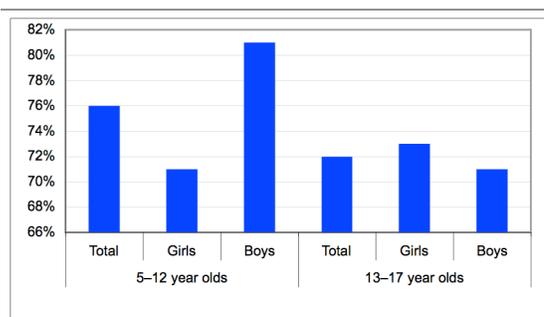
Child's age and sex Parents of male children are more likely than parents of female children to indicate that they have financially supported their children's physical activities and sports. The gender difference is greatest for younger children, with 81% of parents of boys aged 5 to 12 reporting financial support compared to 71% of parents of girls.

Child's participation in sport Parents of children who participate in sport are much more likely than other parents to report that they contribute financially to their children's physical activity (85% versus 48%), especially if the child participates in a competitive and structured activity versus a non-competitive and unstructured activity and if they are coached.

Parent's age and sex Mothers are more likely than fathers to report financial support for their children's physical activities and sports. There are no significant differences related to parents' age.

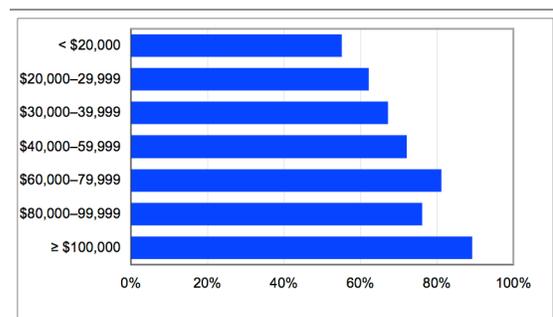
Socio-economic and demographic factors Parental level of education and annual income are also related to financial support of physical activity: the percentage who report support increases with attained education and income. Parents who have never been married are less likely than other parents to indicate that they contribute financially to their children's physical activity. Parents employed on a full- or part-time basis are more likely to state that they provide financial support compared to parents who are retired, homemakers, or who are unemployed or on job leave

**PARENTS PROVIDE FINANCIAL SUPPORT
by child's age and gender**



2005 Physical Activity Monitor, CFLRI

**PARENTS PROVIDE FINANCIAL SUPPORT
by income**



2005 Physical Activity Monitor, CFLRI

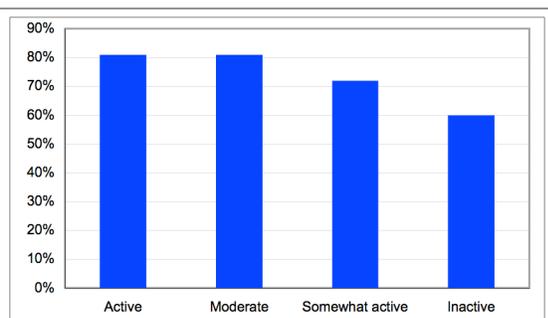
Financial support of children's physical activity and sport (cont'd)

Parent's activity level Parent's level of activity is linked to financial support, as the proportion of parents indicating that they financially support their child's physical activity participation generally increases with increased level of activity.

Parent's participation in sport Parents who participate in sport are more likely than other parents to report having contributed financially to their children's physical activities and sport. Interestingly, parents who do not use a coach are more likely to report financial support of their children's activity. Parents who competed at a higher level (i.e., provincial or higher) are more likely to provide financial support compared to those who compete locally.

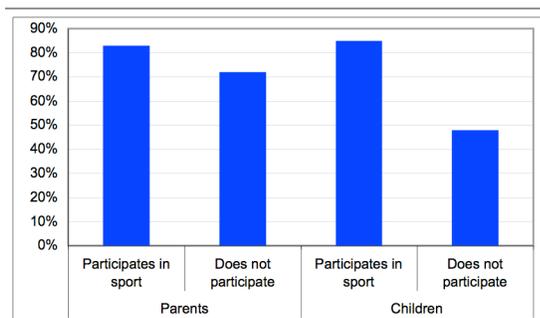
Trends The proportion of parents stating that they financially support their children's physical activities and sports has remained consistently high since 2000. As in 2000, parents of younger children are still more likely to provide this type of support compared to parents of adolescents. In 2005, parents in the Atlantic are more likely, whereas those in the Territories are less likely, to report the provision of this type of financial support compared to 2000. The relationship between parent's activity level, education or income and the provision of financial support is apparent both in 2000 and 2005—that is, parents who are more active, have higher incomes, or have attained higher levels of education are more likely than other parents to provide financial support for their child's physical activity and sport.

**PARENTS PROVIDE FINANCIAL SUPPORT
by activity level**



2005 Physical Activity Monitor, CFLRI

**PARENTS PROVIDE FINANCIAL SUPPORT
by child's and parent's participation in sport**



2005 Physical Activity Monitor, CFLRI

Summary of section

Parental involvement in and support of children's physical activity and sport can manifest in a variety of ways. For example,

- 72% of parents provide financial contributions toward the purchase of equipment, payment of a membership, and/or paying for coaching or instruction and the like.
- 55% of parents take their children to and from places where they can be active *often* or *very often* and 26% *sometimes* do.
- 36% play active games or sports with their children *often* or *very often* while an additional 33% *sometimes* do.
- 37% have volunteered to help with their children's physical activities and sports outside of school during the past year.
- 21% have supervised recess or helped out at a physical activity event at school during the past year.

A greater likelihood of parental involvement is observed among:

- Parents of younger children
- Younger parents
- Parents of children who participate in sport
- Parents who participate in sport
- Highly active parents
- Parents with higher levels of education and income.

There have been some interesting changes since 2000. Notably, parents are less likely to volunteer and to transport their children to places to be active. However, patterns have generally remained constant over time with a few exceptions: (1) Parents of girls are now more likely than parents of boys to play active games and sports and transport their children to sports and physical activities *often* or *very often*. This gender gap did not appear in 2000. (2) Parents who have never been married are now more likely to play active games and sports with their children. This is contrary to the pattern that appeared in 2000. (3) The gender gap that previously appeared between mothers and fathers for volunteering at school is decreasing.

Discussion, Implications and Recommendations

Parents can play a pivotal role in influencing the activity behaviours of children during childhood through their adolescent years. Children and youth are less likely than adults to participate in physical activity on their own.⁵⁰ A notable six in ten children participate in physical activity with their family members, four in ten with classmates, and three in ten with friends.⁵⁰ Interestingly, participation with family members decreases steadily with increasing age: for children up to the age of 12, family is the most frequent source of activity partners. During teen years, classmates become the most frequent partners. However, there has been a lack of consensus in the literature about how social influences, and especially those of parents' activity levels, are associated with children's activity patterns. Nonetheless, there are some consistencies in the literature suggesting parental support and direct assistance from parents, particularly for adolescents, are promising approaches to support physical activity.^{39,2} These can take the form of encouragement and support, or payment of fees and memberships as examples.³⁹ Despite indeterminate

results for the relationship of physical activity levels of parents on the activity levels of their children, parents and other family members are in a potential position of modeling appropriate active behaviours for their children, for example by playing with their children, actively participating in sport or physical activity, or participating as a family.

As shown in this section, parents of young children (age 5 to 12) are more likely than parents of adolescents (age 13 to 17) to report personal involvement in their children's physical activities and sports. The literature shows that parental support and assistance (i.e., through financial assistance) from parents can also be important factor in influencing adolescent physical activity.^{39,2} Moreover, research shows that parents, siblings, and friends who frequently watch a child participate in activity show higher levels of activity.⁵¹ Given the decrease in physical activity levels²¹ and sport participation (earlier section of this report) with the transition from childhood to adolescence, parents could be encouraged to support their children's activity through verbal support, participation or watching, transportation, or direct assistance during the transition to, and indeed throughout, the teenage years. The Physical Activity Monitor examined parental reports of involvement.

Another interesting finding from the Physical Activity Monitor reveals that parents of girls are more likely than parents of boys to be involved in their child's activity and sports, with one exception. That is, financial support of their child's physical activity is greater among parents of boys than parents of girls. The latter is perhaps not surprising given other findings. Research shows that gender differences in activity preferences are apparent for children and youth: girls are generally less active than boys, prefer different types of activities, and prefer a different intensity of activities. National data show that boys are more likely than girls to participate in team sports such as football, baseball or softball, basketball, hockey, and soccer, as well as other activities such as golf or snowboarding.²¹ Some of these activities require a substantial financial commitment for participation.⁵² However, the lower rates of participation in sport and physical activity²¹ among girls are troubling. Some research indicates that parental encouragement influences activity among girls more so than for boys.⁵³ Data from the 2005 Physical Activity Monitor that indicate that parents of girls are more likely than parents of boys to play active games and sports and to transport their child to activities and that this gender gap has evolved over the past 5 years are promising. Moreover, studies show that there are gender differences in the strategies that parents use to encourage their daughters to be more active.⁵⁴ For example, mothers provide "logistic" support, such as registering their daughters and supporting them at a given event. Fathers, on the other hand, are more likely to model behaviours. Both of these types of support are related to higher activity levels for girls, however, a dose-response relationship related to amount of support might be suggested in that when both parents provide support, higher levels of activity are observed. This research indicates that both mothers and fathers can play a role in increasing girls' participation.

Another key finding from the 2005 Physical Activity Monitor involves the association between the greater likelihood of reporting parental involvement for parents who participate in sport themselves and for children who participate in sport. Similarly, parents who are highly active are more likely to indicate that they are involved in their child's physical activity or sport in some way. Research has shown that when both parents participate in sports, their child is more likely to participate in non-school,

structured physical activity than when neither parent does.⁵⁵ Moreover, the General Social Survey in 1998 examined children's participation in sport by activity involvement of parents. Again, a dose-response relationship appears wherein greater participation rates are associated if both parents participate or volunteer than if one or neither did.⁵⁶ This research suggests that active role-modeling by parents and volunteering to support their activity may have a positive effect on the activity levels of children and youth.

Data from the topics reveal that parents with lower incomes and education are less likely to transport their child to their physical activities and sports and to financially support them. Economic disparities also exist for individuals citing the cost of physical activity, difficulty in getting places to be active, and safety concerns as barriers to physical activity: low income adults are more likely to report these as barriers.²⁶ Ensuring accessibility to an environment (including facilities, programs and services) which is supportive of physical activity and sport in low-income neighbourhoods is important. Indeed, research suggests that increased access to low-cost facilities, the availability of open spaces, and a walkable environment that increases the "visibility" of physical activity opportunities in low socioeconomic areas may help change the social norms in that area.⁵⁷

Based on the results of this cross-sectional data, parent-targeted strategies could focus on raising awareness and educating parents of the importance of parental involvement in their child's participation in sport and physical activity. This can be done in a variety of ways, for example through media, and community, provincial or national campaigns. Another means may include physical activity interventions delivered in the primary care setting, as health care provider counselling of adolescents for physical activity has been shown to be effective.⁵⁸ However, an additional obvious option would be educational or informational packages delivered through the schools, as schools have targeted contact with parents. Particular focus of messaging should include types of parental involvement in children's activities and sports:

- during adolescence
- for girls
- for low-income or parents with lower attained levels of education
- by less active parents or parents who do not participate in sport.

