



Mentally Healthy WA

## Mentally Healthy Schools

# Benefits of being active

# Physical activity and wellbeing

### **We know that being active is conducive to good physical health, but how does it benefit mental health in children and young people?**

Regular physical activity is a known protective behaviour for preventing mental health issues, and is beneficial to mental health and wellbeing.

Evidence suggests young people who are more physically active are more likely to report higher levels of wellbeing and life satisfaction, and are less likely to be diagnosed with a mental health condition. Although the evidence is still emerging, it seems exercise may also reduce the incidence of mental health conditions such as depression.

Regular physical activity may also improve cognitive development, social skills and can have positive impacts on academic achievement.

### **Australia's physical activity guidelines**

The national physical activity guidelines recommend children and young people aged between 5 and 17 years should do at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity per day.

Activities that strengthen the muscle and bones should be incorporated into the recommended 60 minutes at least three days per week.

Participation rates of school aged children Data suggests less than half of Western Australian school-aged children (aged 5-15 years) are being active every day with data from 2018 suggesting only 40.1% met the recommended physical activity levels. In addition, 65% of 5-8-year-olds, 78% aged 9-11 years and 72% aged 12-14 years participated in organised sport outside of school only once per week.

Barriers for school aged children participating in organised sport outside of school does change as the students age. The main reason for younger children is not meeting minimum age requirements to participate or financial barriers. For children over 13 years-of-age almost one in three report not being interested in sport/don't like physical activity as the reason they choose not to participate.

### **Health and physical activity in schools**

Within the school setting the School Curriculum and Standards Authority (SCSA) recommends two hours of Health and Physical Education per week from Pre-Primary to Year 10. SCSA recommends this two hours is not solely dedicated to physical activity but also includes the teaching of health and safety, highlighting the need for schools to provide students with more opportunities outside physical education lessons to be physically active.

The school environment is an optimal environment for implementing and promoting regular physical activity to students of all ages outside of the recommended physical education classes.

Evidence shows that students who develop confidence and adequate skills in physical activity at school will be more likely to adopt physically active behaviours outside of school. Adopting whole of school programs and providing opportunities during break times (like recess and lunch), in combination with before and after school opportunities, are three ways schools can provide safe and accessible places for students to be active.

Below are some strategies your school could implement to engage students in physical activity and benefit their physical and mental wellbeing:

#### **Whole of school programs**

- 10-minute morning whole school exercise or yoga classes.
- Develop school sporting clubs or competitions.
- Teachers to include physical activity or outdoor exploration in lesson planning.
- Regular in class brain breaks for students to move and stretch.
- Inclusive physical education and activities.

#### **Opportunities during break times**

- Make equipment enabling physical activity available at recess and lunch.
- Open the gym at recess and lunch and encourage mini tournaments (i.e. table tennis, basketball).

#### **Opportunities before and after school**

- Promote the KidSport grant to parents and caregivers through your school newsletter.
- Encourage walk or bike to school days (if safe and appropriate).
- Consider structural barriers in the school setting for why students aren't using active transport such as bike lockers or lack of access to showers for secondary students.
- Consider structural barriers in the town or suburb such as conditions of footpaths and crosswalks, and discuss opportunities to improve these with the local government.

**Act Belong Commit® can work with you to develop strategies and assist with the development of promotional materials like posters promoting physical activity and mental wellbeing.**



## References

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