

Consensus Statement

On the Role of the Family in the Physical Activity, Sedentary and Sleep Behaviours of Children and Youth



PARTICIPACTION

Families can support children and youth in achieving healthy physical activity, sedentary and sleep behaviours by encouraging, facilitating, modelling, setting expectations and engaging in healthy movement behaviours with them. Other sources of influence are important (e.g., child care, school, health care, community, governments) and can support families in these pursuits.





Background

Healthy physical activity, sedentary and sleep behaviours in childhood and adolescence are essential for healthy growth and development,¹⁻⁹ and this fact led to the development of the Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines.^{10,11} Unfortunately, few Canadian children and youth are meeting these guidelines.¹²⁻¹⁴ There has been a dramatic decline in Canadian children's fitness over the past 35 years,¹⁵⁻¹⁸ which has negatively affected their health.¹⁹⁻²³ The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child protects a child's right to rest and play in recreational and leisure activities appropriate to their age.²⁴ These rights are reinforced in the Canadian Children's Charter.²⁵

Unfortunately, Canadians have not been successful in honouring these commitments. The 2020 ParticipACTION Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth gives Canada a grade of "D+" for Overall Physical Activity, "D+" for Sedentary Behaviour, "B" for Sleep, and "F" for 24-Hour Movement Behaviours.²⁶ A recent UNICEF Canada report supports these findings, highlighting that only 21% of children aged 5-11 years engage in at least 1.5 hours per day of active play and unstructured physical activities.²⁷ Additional findings from Statistics Canada indicate that youth aged 12-17 years accumulate 4 hours per day of screen time outside of school.²⁸

Movement behaviours are affected by the family, home, school, community, government and environment.²⁹⁻³³ The family (e.g., parents, guardians, siblings) is typically the closest and most important influence, and its impact has received considerable research attention.³⁴⁻³⁶ This Consensus Statement was developed by synthesizing and interpreting the research evidence, integrating expert input, and incorporating stakeholder and end-user feedback to provide guidance for families, and those who influence them.

Families vary in structure, function, roles and interactions among members. Families are constantly changing, creating both challenges and opportunities to promote healthy movement behaviours.



Process

The process to develop this Consensus Statement included completing six comprehensive literature reviews, establishing a national multidisciplinary Expert Panel, gathering custom data analyses from Statistics Canada's Canadian Health Measures Survey (CHMS), integrating related research identified by Expert Panel members, conducting a stakeholder consultation process, achieving Expert Panel consensus and releasing the Consensus Statement in conjunction with the 2020 ParticipACTION Report Card.³⁷

Summary of Supporting Evidence

This Consensus Statement applies to all families and is relevant for children and youth aged 0-17 years, including all genders/sexes, ethnicities and family socio-economic statuses. Families vary in structure, function, roles and interactions among members, and are constantly changing,^{38,39} creating both challenges and opportunities for the promotion of healthy movement behaviours.

Overall Movement Behaviours

- ▶ Less than 1 in 5 children and youth in Canada meet national guidelines for physical activity, sedentary and sleep behaviours.^{5,12,14,40}
- ▶ Positive parenting practices and attitudes, perceived control, perceived low risk of harm in activities, and intentions to provide support are critical; parents who make specific plans (how, when, where) are more likely to follow through and support their child's healthy movement behaviours.^{36,41-48}
- ▶ As children age, their families provide less support for movement behaviours; however, parental support remains extremely important in supporting these behaviours in youth.^{49,50}



Physical Activity

- ▶ Parents' physical activity is associated with that of their children, with each additional 20 minutes of parental moderate-to-vigorous physical activity associated with an extra 5 minutes for their child;⁵¹ this finding is supported by other research.^{35,52} Parental fitness characteristics are also related to those of their children.⁵³
- ▶ Family social support is positively associated with children's physical activity levels.⁵⁴
- ▶ There are generally no differences in the physical activity behaviours of children and youth according to the number of siblings in the household, or single- versus two-parent households.⁵³
- ▶ Family-based interventions are generally effective at improving physical activity, while evidence about the efficacy of screen-time interventions to increase physical activity is less conclusive.⁵⁵⁻⁵⁹ Providing families with educational materials about reducing screen time, without providing additional intervention components, may not be effective in changing child and youth physical activity behaviours. Current evidence supports using interventions that focus on self-regulatory approaches (e.g., planning, setting goals) and involve the whole family.⁵⁷
- ▶ Two-thirds of parents said that monitoring their children's media use was more important than respecting their privacy;⁶¹ however, only 14% of youth with a phone or tablet said their parents tracked their device time.⁶²
- ▶ Parents overwhelmingly have positive attitudes about the role of technology in their children's education and development of important skills.⁶¹
- ▶ Children spend less time engaged in screen-based behaviours if they live in households with screen time restrictions.⁶³⁻⁶⁵
- ▶ Higher parenting stress and lower household income are associated with a higher amount of daily screen time in infants and toddlers aged 7-18 months.⁶⁶
- ▶ By age 11, the majority (53%) of children have their own smartphone, and this increases to 69% by age 12.⁶²
- ▶ Children aged 9-12 years from higher-income homes accumulate an hour and 50 minutes less screen time per day than those from lower-income households.⁶²

Sedentary Behaviours

- ▶ The number of parents who reported that they spend too much time on their own mobile devices increased from 29% in 2016 to 52% in 2019.⁶⁰
- ▶ The proportion of children and youth who thought their parent(s) were addicted to their mobile devices and wished their parent(s) would get off their device increased from 28% in 2016 to 39% in 2019.⁶⁰
- ▶ 78% of parents believed they were good media and technology role models for their children,⁶¹ even though the parents reported having high levels of screen viewing.
- ▶ Good sleep hygiene is associated with positive sleep outcomes, such as longer sleep duration and better quality of sleep. Good sleep hygiene includes regular bedtimes, consistent bedtime routines (e.g., bathing, brushing teeth, reading) and screen-free bedrooms.⁷⁰⁻⁷³
- ▶ One-third of youth keep their mobile devices in bed with them.⁶⁰
- ▶ Having screens in bedrooms is consistently linked with less sleep.⁶⁷⁻⁶⁹

Sleep

Conceptual Model

The Expert Panel developed the conceptual model below. It builds on earlier models that examined family systems in the context of child health behaviour change, and also incorporates new

evidence.⁷⁴⁻⁷⁶ The model illustrates the complexity of the family's role in influencing integrated movement behaviours, and provides a guide for future research and interventions.





Recommendations

Families may find it challenging to support children and youth in achieving the 24-Hour Movement Guidelines. A list of recommendations for how families, and those who influence them, can improve the physical activity, sedentary and sleep behaviours of children and youth is provided below. These recommendations are based on the evidence reviewed for the Consensus Statement, and the expertise of the Expert Panel members.

Including parents, elders, grandparents, siblings, legal guardians

Family

Overall Movement Behaviours

- ▶ Know, understand and strive to adhere to the 24-Hour Movement Guidelines.^{10,11}
- ▶ Establish an environment that supports healthy movement, and create routines and expectations for meeting the 24-Hour Movement Guidelines.^{10,11}
- ▶ Recognize that engaging in recommended healthy movement behaviours reinforces family cohesiveness.
- ▶ Be a good role model by being physically active, limiting your own sedentary behaviour and screen time, and practising healthy sleep habits.
- ▶ Help children self-regulate their behaviours by setting expectations and making sure to involve them in deciding how they can meet the 24-Hour Movement Guidelines.^{10,11}
- ▶ Encourage more outdoor time to increase physical activity, decrease sedentary behaviour and improve sleep.⁷⁷

Physical Activity

- ▶ Facilitate physical activity by encouraging, watching, role modelling and attending physical activity events, and by co-participation.^{52,54,78-91}
- ▶ Be active as a family – this encourages physical activity, social support, connectedness and attachment, which are all important for good mental health.⁹²
- ▶ Promote and support opportunities for physical activity, active outdoor play and sport at home and school, and in the community.²⁶
- ▶ Incorporate more opportunities for active transportation – walk, bike, wheel, skateboard, scooter or take transit to school, stores, parks and activities.⁹³
- ▶ Allow your children to play and roam unsupervised, while ensuring that their range is safe.⁹⁴
- ▶ Join with other families in enabling physical activity opportunities.



Sedentary Behaviours

- ▶ Create a family media plan that includes:
 - * Setting limits around screen viewing consistent with established guidelines^{10,11,63,64,69,95-108}
 - * Prioritizing screen-free family time^{97,109,110}
 - * Prioritizing device-free time at home and using “device baskets” (bins for personal mobile devices) as an aid
 - * Removing screens from children’s bedrooms^{68,69,97,109-118}
 - * Having screen-free family meals^{97,104,109,110,116,119-121}
- ▶ Avoid using screen time as a reward.
- ▶ Be present and engaged when screens are used, and co-view when possible.^{10,11,95-97,99,109,110}
- ▶ Break up children’s prolonged sitting with movement whenever possible – at home and during travel.^{10,11,95-97,99}

Sleep

- ▶ Create and adhere to a consistent bedtime routine (e.g., bathing, brushing teeth, reading).^{10,11,95-97,99,122-124}
- ▶ Schedule and encourage a regular bedtime that allows for sufficient sleep.^{10,11,95,100,125,126}
- ▶ Support screen-free bedrooms for all family members.^{97,104,110,122,127-134}
- ▶ Discourage screen viewing in the hour before bedtime.^{96,109,110}
- ▶ Provide children with a comfortable and quiet sleeping environment.^{122,124-126}

Educators & School Administrators

- ▶ Support families’ pursuit of healthy movement behaviours for their children and youth by:
 - * Knowing and understanding the 24-Hour Movement Guidelines^{10,11}
 - * Embracing opportunities to incorporate healthy and inclusive movement messages, practices and policies into daily school routines and lessons by:
 - Respecting daily physical activity (DPA) policies
 - Ensuring all children have access to daily recess breaks that encourage physical activity
 - Reducing excessive safety restrictions on physical activity on school grounds (e.g., tag, tree climbing)
 - Minimizing long periods of sedentary behaviour and interrupting any long periods with active breaks
 - Scheduling classes to encourage changes in posture
 - Providing options for standing desks in classrooms and libraries¹³⁵
 - Creating a culture that moderates the use of screens in schools
 - Integrating sleep health messages into the school curriculum
 - Supporting children and youth in self-regulating their habitual movement behaviours
 - Modelling healthy movement behaviours and discussing the importance of healthy, habitual movement behaviours
 - Assigning healthy movement behaviour homework – more physical activity, less sedentary behaviour and screen time, and a good night’s sleep
- ▶ Ensuring that before- and after-school programming incorporates healthy and inclusive movement messages, practices and policies.





Academics & Researchers

- ▶ Help inform families' pursuit of healthy movement behaviours for their children and youth by:
 - * Addressing evidence gaps in understanding family influence on healthy movement behaviours
 - * Examining family-based interventions that use various behaviour modification techniques to address healthy physical activity, sedentary and sleep behaviours concurrently
 - * Studying the external factors that mediate families' ability to adhere to the 24-Hour Movement Guidelines
 - * Advocating for evidence-informed policies and practices related to the role of the family in healthy physical activity, sedentary and sleep behaviours
 - * Engaging in knowledge translation efforts targeting families, the media, educators and policymakers

Health Care Practitioners

- ▶ Support families' pursuit of healthy movement behaviours for their children and youth by:
 - * Promoting the 24-Hour Movement Guidelines^{10,11} and recommendations from the Canadian Paediatric Society's Position Statement on Digital Media Use^{109,110} during routine visits
 - * Asking about the family's movement behaviours and emphasizing a whole family approach to improving these behaviours
 - * Recommending that family members encourage, facilitate, model, set expectations, and participate in efforts that allow their children to achieve healthy movement behaviours
 - * Becoming familiar with resources that enable families to support healthy movement behaviours
 - * Advocating for preventive health-care tools such as the Rourke Baby Record and Greig Record to include an assessment of the family's role in physical activity, sedentary and sleep behaviours^{109,110,136,137}

Allied professionals and community programming staff

- ▶ Support families' pursuit of healthy movement behaviours for their children and youth by:
 - * Integrating key messages from the 24-Hour Movement Guidelines^{10,11} into community-based programming
 - * Modifying programs for parents by integrating healthy movement recommendations
 - * Incorporating planning activities (e.g., developing sleep routines, screen time planning, physical activity scheduling) in family interventions/service provision
 - * Encouraging and facilitating standing, stretching and quiet movement while clients are waiting or during events

Employers

- ▶ Support families' pursuit of healthy movement behaviours for their children and youth by:
 - * Ensuring healthy 24-hour movement behaviours are part of a child and family health component in workplace wellness initiatives
 - * Allowing flexibility in work hours to enable parents to promote and practise healthy family movement behaviours



Federal,
provincial,
territorial,
municipal as
appropriate

Governments

- ▶ Support families' pursuit of healthy movement behaviours for their children and youth by:
 - * Developing, implementing and evaluating strategies for healthy movement behaviours that draw from the guiding strategy "A Common Vision for Increasing Physical Activity and Reducing Sedentary Living in Canada: Let's Get Moving"¹³⁸
 - * Providing sustained resources and developing policies for the promotion and implementation of the 24-Hour Movement Guidelines in the context of the family¹³⁹
 - * Promoting healthy 24-hour movement behaviours by increasing access to schools, recreation centres and other public spaces outside of school hours
 - * Supporting families' participation in sport and recreation activities¹⁴⁰
 - * Requiring manufacturers of digital screen devices to disclose on product labels the potential harms associated with excessive use
 - * Investing in no-charge active play spaces (especially outdoors) for families with children of all ages
 - * Providing infrastructure and social marketing to support families in adopting active transport practices
 - * Updating educational curricula to better incorporate healthy physical activity, sedentary and sleep behaviours with a family-focused lens and through a whole-school approach
 - * Supporting neighbourhood associations, recreation centres and schools in developing programs to encourage family physical activity
 - * Reviewing and amending bylaws as needed to allow, promote and encourage outdoor play opportunities (e.g., climbing trees, playing street hockey and pick-up ball games, building tree forts, tobogganing)
 - * Providing transit options that reach beaches, hiking trails, parks and other areas that promote healthy movement behaviours
 - * Developing child protection policies that promote independent movement opportunities suited to the capacity of the child and their environment



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