

Helping children and young people get active over the summer holidays



As the school summer holidays approach, we've prepared some advice and ideas for activity providers based on the insight we have on children and young people's activity levels and attitudes about being active.

Our research shows that children and young people's activity levels are lower than they were before the pandemic and this is even more pronounced for those from less affluent families and from some culturally diverse communities.

On top of this, we know that some groups of children and young people have also been feeling less confident when taking part, aren't finding sport and being active as easy and aren't enjoying being active as much as they used to.

All of this is important to consider when designing and running activities and tailoring messaging for parents or carers. Here are some of the things to bear in mind:

Focus on the fun and enjoyment

What we know: Enjoyment is the biggest driver of children and young people's activity levels, and there's an established link between them feeling positive about taking part in sport and physical activity, and then doing so. Feeling confident when taking part, and finding sport and being active easy (competence), could be low for children and young people who've had lots of disruption or not been able to do an activity for a long time because of the pandemic.

How you can help: Focus on providing activities based around being fun and informal. Tailor your messages to emphasise what your activity will be like – enjoyable, a chance to have a good time with friends, helping to build confidence. If parents/carers know it's going to be something fun, their child(ren) are likely to know that too.

Create a friendly, safe and positive environment and ease children and young people into activities without focusing too much on developing skills and/or fitness. Actively involve them in helping to shape activities where you can – listen to their needs and try to act on their feedback.

Try to make it family-friendly

What we know: Family has a major influence on participation. We know there are strong associations between the attitudes and behaviours of parents/carers and those of their children – the more active a parent/carer is, the more active their child(ren) are. And the more positive a parent/carer feels towards sport or activity, the more likely their child(ren) are to be active.

How you can help: Think about ways you can make activities fun and family-friendly, that focus on opportunities for active play or a chance to try an activity that might be new or different. Messaging should centre around activities that are easy to access, don't take a long time to do, are low cost or free, or that can be done flexibly in a range of places – for example at home or at the local park with little or no equipment, or just walking, scooting and cycling.

Offer a choice

What we know: While the pandemic has created many barriers to being active, choice has been key in helping to maintain older girls' activity levels and enjoyment in particular. For some children and young people, the past 16 months have been a chance to do things differently – so some have enjoyed being active more than usual, using the extra time to take ownership of what they do and trying out new things in a way that feels safe, supported and free from pressure or judgement.

How you can help: Consider providing a range of different opportunities and activities that cater for a range of abilities, and tailor your messaging to bring this to the fore.

Think about ways of reducing any pressure or judgement so that children and young people can work at a pace and in an environment that suits them. For example, this may mean less focus on performance or competition, or being more relaxed about any kit that they need to wear. Create opportunities to connect with friends in a relaxed, informal environment.