
Louisiana WIC

Sharing Session Guidelines

on

Active Play, Every Day

Contents:

Guidelines for a Sharing Session on Active Play	Page 1
Outline for a Sharing Session on Active Play	Page 3
Background Information on Active Play	Page 4

Guidelines for a Sharing Session on Active Play, Every Day

■ Sharing Session Topic: Active Play, Every Day

■ Sharing Session Audience:

Parents and caregivers of infants and/or children, at Recertification or Revisit.
Session is appropriate nutrition education for infants and children with all WIC risk codes.
Session is especially appropriate for families of children at risk of overweight and obesity (risk codes 113, 114) but is suitable for all families.

■ Sharing Session Outline

These guidelines include one possible outline for a Sharing Session on “Active Play, Every Day.” This outline, based entirely on group discussion, is one of many alternatives for a Sharing Session on this topic. Your session might be completely different. You might decide to combine group discussion with an activity (making a toy, for instance) or a demonstration (such as involving caregivers and children in an active indoor game).

■ The topic “Active play, every day” lends itself to a Sharing Session because:

- All infants and children play.
- There is no “right” or “wrong” way to play.
- All participants in the Sharing Session will have experience with play and something to contribute.

■ Major areas that might be covered in discussion:

Participants could discuss their concerns, interests, knowledge, and experiences regarding:

- their values about active play (how they feel about its importance and value)
- their views on one hour of active play a day for young children
- being physically active themselves
- relationship of activity to body weight
- barriers to personal and family physical activity
- safety issues
- age-appropriate play for infants and children
- balance of active play, quiet play
- how children learn from play
- toys and games that help children be active

■ Stimulating discussion using open-ended questions:

The facilitator could stimulate group discussion on “Active Play, Every Day” using open-ended questions, such as:

- What were your favorite play activities when you were a child?
- Do you think your kids are as active as you were?
- How is playing outside different now than it was for you?
- How do you keep your kids safe, playing outside?
- What do you think of the recommendation that infants and young children should get at least an hour a day of active play?

- What activities on the “Play” brochures do you already do with your child? What things are listed that you would like to try?
- How do you feel when you get regular physical activity?
- What are the benefits of physical activity for children?
- What are some ways your whole family is (or can be) active together?
- What kinds of homemade toys and games does your child enjoy?
- What kinds of quiet play does your child enjoy?

■ **Resources:**

- A supply of Baby Play, (CN-5) Toddler Play, (CN-6) and Child Play (CN-7) brochures will provide participants with play ideas and information appropriate to their infant or child’s age. Here is an overview of the themes in these educational materials:
 - Infants and children are ready for different kinds of play as they develop.
 - Infants and children need active play every day.
 - Infants and children enjoy a balance of active play and quiet play.
 - Interactive experiences with caregivers—such as talking, playing, and reading— provide important opportunities for learning and bonding.
 - Infants and children enjoy using their developing skills to feed themselves.
 - Safety is important.

■ **Other Materials:**

- Pencils or pens (one for each participant, collect at end of session)
- Evaluation Forms, “What did you think of today’s Sharing Session?”
- Optional: basket or box of a variety of toys and books for children to play with while their caregivers participate in the Sharing Session

Outline for a Sharing Session on Active Play, Every Day

■ Welcome

- Introduce yourself, state the topic, how long session will take.
- Warmly invite participants to let their kids play with the toys and books.
- Cover the “Ground Rules” briefly.
- State your role (helping the discussion go smoothly) and the participants’ role (sharing their ideas, concerns, knowledge and experiences about Active Play).

■ Icebreaker:

“Let’s go around and tell our names and the kinds of play we loved when we were kids. I’ll start. As I said, I’m __(first name)_ and when I was a kid, I loved to climb, run, and jump.”

■ Learning Partners:

Team up with your learning partner (tell them how to do that) and for 2 minutes, discuss “How active are your kids, compared to you when you were a kid?”

■ Discussion

Here are possible questions to encourage discussion, unless participants carry the discussion in another direction. Go with the participant’s interests and concerns!

• How active kids are, compared to parents

- “Who wants to share how active kids are now compared to years ago?”
- “How is playing outside different for your kids than it was for you?” (If safety comes up: “How do you keep your kids safe, playing outside?”)

• One hour a day of active play

“There is a national recommendation that infants and children should get physically active play that adds up to at least an hour a day--and adults should be active a half hour a day.”

- “How close do you and your kids get to this amount of activity each day?”
- “Let’s look at the activities on the “Play” brochures under your child’s age. Which things do you already do with your baby or child? Which things would you like to try?”

• How activity makes you feel

- “How you feel when you get regular physical activity?”
- “What do you notice about your child when he or she is physically active?” (Sleeps better, happier, eats better?)
- “What are some ways your whole family is (or can be) more active together?”

■ Goal setting:

- “As a result of today’s discussion, what activities would you like to do more of with your kids?” (Maybe write it on the back of the Play brochure.)
- “Would anyone like to share what they wrote?”

■ Closing:

Summarize the discussion, if there is time. End with, “Thank you for coming and for sharing so much with each other! I really enjoyed being with you today and talking about these things! Please take a minute to fill out the evaluation form. Thanks!”

Background Information for a Sharing Session on Active Play, Every Day

The following information, appearing on pages 4-8, provides a background on the importance of physical activity and active play in infancy and early childhood. The material is excerpted and adapted from *Bright Futures in Practice: Physical Activity*, 2001.*

Participation in physical activity is beneficial to children and adolescents. Regular physical activity contributes to overall health and well-being and reduces the risk of chronic disease in adulthood. Regular physical activity helps children and adolescents develop healthy physical activity behaviors they can sustain through their lives.

Participating in regular physical activity also:

- Increases muscle and bone strength.
- Increases lean muscle mass and helps decrease body fat.
- Helps maintain weight and is a key part of any weight loss program.
- Enhances psychological well-being.
- May reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety and improve mood. ¹

Children and adolescents can substantially improve their health and quality of life by making physical activity a part of their daily lives. Being physically active early in life has many physical, social, and emotional benefits and can lead to a reduced incidence of chronic diseases in adulthood. Health professionals, families, and communities need to make a concerted effort to increase the physical activity levels of children and adolescents.

Physical Activity in Infancy

The first year of life is marked by dramatic changes in the amount and type of physical activity displayed. Infants spend the first days of life sleeping and eating. However, one year later, when they become toddlers, they usually are crawling and probably have taken a few independent steps.

The way infants are held and handled, the toys they play with, and their environment all influence their motor skill development. Parents can influence the quality of the infant's movements by providing a stimulating environment. Physical activity should be promoted from the time infants are born. Motor skills do not just appear. Motor skills and thinking skills flourish when the infant is exposed to a stimulating environment. Physical activity opportunities and nurturing of motor skill development during the first year of life establish the foundation for physical activity behaviors.

* Patrick K, Spear B, Holt K, Sofka D, eds. 2001. *Bright Futures in Practice: Physical Activity*. Arlington, Va: National Center for Education in Maternal and Child Health and Georgetown University, used with permission. Document is available in its entirety at <<www.brightfutures.org>> Copies available from NMCHC web site: <<www.nmchc.org>>

Growth and Physical Development

Muscles are not well developed at birth. Therefore, most of the first year of life involves building muscle mass. Infants need arm muscles to pick up objects. They need leg muscles to crawl, stand, and eventually walk. They need their head and trunk muscles to control these two large body parts, and they need arm and leg muscles to move their trunks.

Nervous system development in infants involves the connection of 200 billion neurons, the conducting cells of the nervous system. Stimulation is critical to neuron development. Without stimulation (for example, sight, hearing and touch), these cells die. With stimulation, these cells create elaborate networks that promote sensory and motor skill development. Stimulation can be provided in many ways, such as by hanging a mobile over the infant's crib, which may motivate the infant to reach, or by placing a toy just out of reach, which may motivate the infant to roll over.

Healthy Lifestyles

Infants' vitality and successful development depend on good nutrition during the first year of life. Full-term infants who are fed on demand usually consume the amount they need to grow well. However, feeding infants is much more complex than simply offering food when they are hungry, and it serves purposes far beyond supporting their physical growth. Feeding provides opportunities for emotional bonding between the parent and infant. Infants improve their hand-eye coordination and fine motor skills as they begin to feed themselves.

In addition to interaction during feeding times, infants need play time to explore objects, engage in activities that stimulate their senses, and experience movement and action.

Counseling

Health professionals can use the following information to provide anticipatory guidance to families. Anticipatory guidance provides information on the infant's physical status and on what to expect as the infant enters the next developmental period, and fosters the promotion of physical activity.

- Encourage parents to attend classes to learn about promoting physical activity during infancy. Suggest that they participate in parent-infant play groups.
- Infants need the opportunity to move. Encourage parents to provide objects and toys and to play games to encourage their infants to move and do things for themselves.
- Gently turning, rolling, bouncing, and swaying infants are excellent ways to increase their muscle strength and to help them develop important connections between the brain and muscles.
- Tell parents that rough-and-tumble activities are not appropriate for infants. Infants usually signal their distress (such as by crying) if the physical activity is too vigorous or overwhelming. Parents should pay attention to these signals and stop the physical activity if needed.
- Encourage parents to ask their child care providers how much time the infant spends moving around (in other words, not sitting in an infant safety seat or sleeping.)

Physical Activity in Early Childhood

During early childhood (ages 1 to 4), a child's world expands to include friends, schoolmates, and others in the community. The child's physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development are tightly linked. For this reason, physical activity affects not only the physical health of children but also their overall health status.

Early childhood is divided into two stages: the toddler stage, ages 1 to 2, and the young child stage, ages 3 to 4. The toddler stage can be stressful for parents as toddlers develop a sense of independence. As they get older, children become more interested in trying new activities.

Early childhood is a key period for promoting physical activity. During these years, fundamental motor skills and basic movement patterns that all children tend to develop (such as walking, running, galloping, jumping, hopping, skipping, throwing, catching, striking, kicking, balancing), begin to develop. If children are encouraged to be physically active, these skills can develop into advanced patterns of motor coordination that can last a lifetime. Unfortunately, many children barely acquire fundamental motor skills and some will not develop advanced patterns of motor coordination because they are not encouraged to participate in physical activities that provide opportunities to practice these skills.

Children this age usually play and explore. However, many spend only 10 to 20 percent of their time participating in gross motor physical activities which require whole-body participation (for example, walking, running, climbing). Many children spend too much time participating in sedentary behaviors (for example, watching television and videotapes, playing computer games, playing with toys that do not require the child to move).

Children benefit from physical activity in a number of ways. Physical activity can:

- Give children a feeling of accomplishment
- Reduce the risk of certain diseases, if children continue to be active during adulthood
- Promote mental health

Growth and Physical Development

Skeletal growth is steady in early childhood and nonintensive physical activity does not damage growing bones. Joints are flexible and they get even more flexible during this period. Muscles continue to grow. The nervous system continues to develop and vision continues to improve. (Children's vision does not fully mature before ages 6 or 7.) Kinesthesia—the sense that detects body position, weight, and movement of the muscles, tendons, and joints—improves, as does a child's sense of balance. Cognition (thinking) skills also improve.

Healthy Lifestyles

Early childhood is a key time for promoting the development of motor skills and physical activity behaviors. Most children are active but may not have the opportunity to play and explore because of space or safety concerns, or because their parents do not encourage them to be physically active.

Children in early childhood should be encouraged to participate in physical activity. Simple games such as “Simon Says,” chase, and tag are appropriate. Physical activities (for example, tumbling, gymnastics, dancing) tailored to the developmental needs of children are also appropriate. Because most children need to develop motor skills, they are not ready for organized sports, which require visual acuity, control, and balance.

Counseling

General Counseling:

- Children should be physically active every day or nearly every day, as part of play, games, physical education, planned physical activities, recreation, and sports, in the context of family, school, and community activities.
- Encourage parents to promote daily physical activity (for example, walking, running, riding a tricycle or bike, dancing, playing with a ball or at the playground, playing on equipment that requires balance, playing games such as “Simon Says”).
- Developmentally appropriate organized activities such as tumbling, gymnastics, and dancing are excellent for children if they are taught by qualified, experienced instructors.
- Encourage parents to wait until their children are 6 years old before beginning organized sports. At younger ages, children are too young to understand rules and strategies and to handle the emotional and social stress sometimes associated with organized sports.
- Encourage parents to let children do things for themselves (for example, letting them climb up into the child safety seat).
- Explain to parents how to encourage their children to participate in physical activity. For example, parents can play with their children before watching television, then gradually extend playtime and decrease television time.
- Encourage parents to participate in physical activity with their children and to be positive role models by participating in physical activity themselves.
- Discuss with parents the importance of using child care providers who promote physical activity and have the space and equipment for it.

Physical Development Counseling:

- Children do not develop catching, throwing, and kicking skills by a specific age. However, if children have not attempted any of these activities by age 4, they may have difficulty keeping up with their peers.

Injury Prevention Counseling:

- Emphasize that children should be supervised when they participate in physical activity.
- Emphasize the importance of safety equipment (such as helmets) when children participate in physical activity.
- Emphasize the importance of reducing children’s exposure to sunlight while playing outdoors and thus their risk of developing skin cancer. Recommend that parents practice preventive strategies such as (1) applying a broad-spectrum sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) rating of 15 or greater to children’s exposed skin 30 minutes before they go outdoors, (2) reapplying sunscreen every 2 hours, and (3) ensuring that children wear broad-spectrum child-sized sunglasses and brimmed hats and clothing that protect the skin as much as possible.

Safety Counseling:

- If the safety of the environment or neighborhood is a concern, help parents find other settings for physical activity (such as Boys and Girls Clubs of America, recreation centers, churches and other places of worship).
- Remind parents that children can do many activities indoors with soft equipment that can be used in tight spaces (for example, paying tag or hide-and-seek, tossing a ball, crawling through an obstacle course).

Reference:

1. Bayley N. 1969. Manual for the Bayley Scales of Infant Development. New York, NY: The Psychological Corp.