

A photograph of three children playing outdoors on a paved area. A girl in a striped shirt and brown pants is on the left, holding a pink balloon. A boy in a white shirt and grey shorts is in the center, running. Another child is partially visible behind him. The background shows a building with windows and a brick wall. The entire image has a purple tint.

Let's be healthy together!

GETTING ACTIVE

*best start
meilleur départ*

by/par health **nexus** santé

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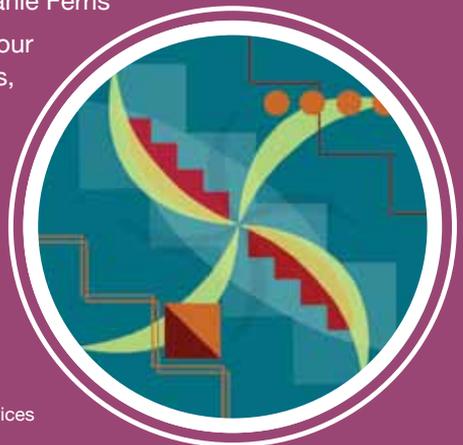
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We played games outdoors. The indoor games were string games and inugaq, which are small seal bones, and we would pretend to hunt animals. There was a focus on role playing, imitating adults and their tasks. We used our language to pretend that we were out hunting somewhere. That was our main game for the boys. The girls played together too, pretending to be a family. We pretended to be a certain family when we played together.

~Inuk Elder Pauloosie Angmarlik from *In the Words of Elders*

A photograph of a woman with dark hair and sunglasses on her head, wearing a light blue patterned shirt, smiling as she pushes a child on a swing. The child is wearing a red tank top and a light-colored hat. The background is a park with trees and a playground structure, slightly out of focus. The lighting suggests it's late afternoon or early evening.

***Our people have
the answers.***

**~Mohawk teacher Diane
Longboat (Kahontakwas),
Six Nations**

1 Why we developed this book

By Melanie Ferris, Ojibwe/Sioux mother and Aboriginal health promotion consultant at Health Nexus

On behalf of Health Nexus and our Aboriginal advisory council, I am happy to invite you to learn from our *Let's Be Healthy Together* series.

Health Nexus is a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting health for more than 25 years. These tools were developed using evidence-based health information as well as through interviewing a range of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis parents, role models, and service providers. You'll see quotes from the Aboriginal people that were interviewed throughout our books.

Words We Use

Some of the words that we use in this book include:

- **Aboriginal:** This is a word to describe First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people. These are the first peoples of Canada.
- **Diet:** A diet is simply all of the foods that you eat. It doesn't have to be low-calorie or low-fat.
- **Elder:** A respected person in an Aboriginal community who is valued for their wisdom and life experience.
- **Healing:** For many Aboriginal people, our healing processes are often related to things such as residential schools, foster care, the sixties scoop, etc. For some people, healing happens when they get in touch with their cultural identity by exploring things such as ceremonies and teachings.
- **Nutrition:** This is how your body uses food. It breaks food down into nutrients that your body can then use for growth and development.
- **Obesity:** This is a medical condition where your body has too much fat on it. Obesity is linked to a shorter life expectancy and increased health risks. Ask your doctor how to measure obesity for your age and body size.
- **Physical activity:** This is simply moving your body and getting active. Some people also call it exercise, but physical activity could be gardening, hunting, trapping, or dancing.
- **Service provider:** This is any person who provides care to you, such as a doctor, nurse, teacher, etc.

Why should we think about obesity?

Childhood obesity is a growing concern for all people in Canada. As Aboriginal people, we are especially concerned because we are less healthy than other Canadians. Our poor health status is closely connected to poverty, isolation, and the move away from our traditional lifestyles.

As Aboriginal people, we have always been healthy until we started to adapt to the modern lifestyle. Similar to other populations in developed countries (Wabitsch, 2006), we are now seeing obesity as a common problem because our bodies are not used to unhealthy foods and being inactive.

Why should I use this book?

This book is for parents and families raising Aboriginal children between the ages of 0 to 6 in Ontario. Use this book to learn more about how you can give your child the best start in life when it comes to being active. Since you know your child the best, use this book to get more ideas about how to get moving with your young one(s). This book has phone numbers and website links to free programs and resources that can help your family be healthy.

We designed our tools to help you think about ways of raising healthy children. We focus on physical activity in this book to give you some ideas to help prevent obesity amongst your children. Many of the tips in this book are also available in video or audio format. For other learning tools in our *Let's Be Healthy Together* series, please visit us online at www.letsbehealthy.ca.

Look for the other books in our *Let's Be Healthy* series if you'd like more ideas about getting active, eating healthy food, and building healthy communities. Other books in this series include:

- *Creating Healthier Communities*
- *Eating the Right Stuff*
- *Prevent Childhood Obesity: A Guide for Service Providers*



The kids that I see really love doing the Inuit games, the different high kicks, the muskox push, the stick pull, all of that stuff that we teach them here. They love doing that.

~Inuk mother Heidi Langille,
manager of children's
program at the Ottawa Inuit
Children's Centre



2 Being active is important for children

This chapter includes information on:

- How much physical activity we need
- The importance of encouraging girls
- Being a positive role model
- Fun activities for all ages
- How the food you eat affects what you can do

Physical activity (sometimes also called “exercise”) is important for everyone. It is especially important for children because it helps your children grow and develop in a healthy way.



Make sure your child gets moving every day. This helps your child to:

- balance all his parts: mind, body, emotions, and spirit;
- build strong bones and muscles;
- stay flexible;
- have a healthy weight;
- have good posture and balance;
- improve fitness and strengthen his heart;
- build confidence and help him feel good about himself;
- reduce stress; and
- help him sleep. (Dietitians of Canada, 2007b)

Round dances you're dancing a lot, so there's a lot of physical exercise there... in terms of staying healthy we did sweat lodges, so you're taught about the importance of berries for instance with anti-oxidants and keeping yourself healthy that way, natural sweeteners, that type of thing. Being part of the community... is how I picked up my Métis identity. Talent shows are a huge thing for Métis people for some reason. People get up on stage and they'll be in a band or they'll jig or they'll sing or, yeah, that's probably about the extent of it. Singing and being a musician... oh fiddle playing of course.

~Métis artist and jigger Jaime Koebel, mother to three young children

The summer sports that our people played and your people played was lacrosse. It was played by all Nations and it was originally played as a healing game. It was a game to resolve disputes, it was for conflict resolution. There was a ceremony first as the players on each team presented themselves to the Creator and said, "Here's our conflicting views, we can't resolve it as human beings so we turn it over to you Creator..."

They used lacrosse for conflict resolution, healing, bringing the community together. So when you start to look at the nature of lacrosse, you know, the equipment is not that expensive and it's an incredible game of skill and drills, speed and running and agility.

~Mohawk teacher Diane Longboat, Six Nations



Physical activity is an easy and important way of connecting to culture and a healthy sense of self. Examples of physical activity that help to promote culture include:

- Dancing (pow wow dancing, jigging, and Inuit dances)
- Fishing
- Foraging for roots and medicines
- Gardening
- Gathering berries
- Hiking
- Hunting or playing games that teach hunting skills
- Playing lacrosse

Fast fact: 30 minutes a day can change your life

Did you know that including 30 minutes of activity every day can help improve your life? Children who are active enjoy:

- Reduced stress
- Better heart health
- Less chances of developing type 2 diabetes
- Less chance of becoming overweight or obese
- Less likely to develop some types of cancers later in life

You may not be sure where to start, or you might be a little bit scared. Try to pick something you love doing that gets your body moving, and just try to do it every day for at least 30 minutes. Any activity is better than nothing!



How much physical activity we need

There are no guidelines for children (ages 0 to 6) in Canada on how much physical activity they should be getting every day. Guidelines for children 6 to 9 say that they should be getting 90 minutes of physical activity every day (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2002).

The Ontario Public Health Association and the Nutrition Resource Centre say that preschoolers should try to work up to getting 60 minutes of endurance activities (those that make the heart beat faster) each day.

During the after-school programs we have at least 30 minutes of physical activity each session with the children.

~First Nations mother and healthy eating/active living program coordinator, Sabrina Boucher, Anishnawbe Mushkiki Aboriginal Community Health Centre, Thunder Bay

Physical activity doesn't always need to be an organized sport—endurance activities include things such as:

- going for a walk;
- running through the sprinkler;
- building a snowperson;
- playing on a play/climbing structure;
- moving things around; and
- “mowing” the lawn (make sure children use a toy lawnmower).

If you're just starting to help your child get active

Aim to get at least 30 minutes of physical activity every day. Try to work your way up to 60 minutes each day. You may find yourself enjoying your active lifestyle so much that you'll soon find it easy to get your 60 minutes of activity every day!



What if my child is already active enough?

You may feel that your young child is active enough. You may even have trouble slowing her down. Children are naturally active, so make sure you support and encourage her.



Researchers, doctors, and community leaders worry that children today are spending more time in front of TV screens and developing poor eating habits. These things are leading to more childhood obesity. Parents can make a difference, even if their child is already overweight. But preventing obesity is best. Children who become obese are more likely to struggle with their weight as they grow into adults (Wabitsch, 2006).

Did you know?

Experts say the best approach is to try to keep obesity from happening in the first place.

The first few years of life are the best time for you to help your child develop a positive attitude to healthy eating and active living. She'll carry this attitude to her later years.

Did you know?

- Most Aboriginal children take part in sport outside of school hours at least once per week (65%). Specifically, 23% of children never take part, 12% take part less than once per week, 39% take part 1 to 3 times per week, and 26% engaged in some type of sports 4 or more times per week.
- Sports participants watch fewer hours of television than children who don't take part.
- Métis and Inuit children appear to have higher rates of sports participation than do First Nations children and those who identified as both First Nations and Métis.
- First Nations children living off-reserve had higher rates of participation than did children living on-reserve. (Findlay, 2007)
- Over half of Canadian children are NOT active enough to help them grow and develop in a healthy way.
- Children become less active as they get older.
- Children have less time for active play when they are in school.
- Girls tend to become less active than boys as they get older. (Dietitians of Canada, 2007a)



The word exercise brings up a lot of dread and like, “Oh god, I gotta do that again,” that kind of thing. But finding something that you’re passionate about like hockey, I’ve been playing hockey all my life. Or where my boys come it’s soccer. Then it’s not exercise it’s fun. That’s the important part.

~Inuk mother of four Heidi Langille, program manager at Ottawa Inuit Children’s Centre

The importance of encouraging girls

Aboriginal people in Ontario are concerned that girls are not encouraged to play sports and get active. Statistics for mainstream Canadians show that girls generally tend to become less active than boys over time.

If you know any young girls in your family or community:

- Take extra care to encourage them to play sports and get active.
- Try not to promote or subscribe to any gender roles. For example, girls are very capable of playing hockey or hunting or building a campfire—the same goes for boys, who should be able to pursue any sport that interests him, including ballet, gymnastics, figure skating, etc.

Encourage both girls and boys to take part in a wide variety of activities.

I was so self-conscious as a kid. I did track and field a lot when I was in grade seven and eight and was really good at it and encouraged to go into it in high school but I was too self-conscious. Being introduced to it at a young age and getting confidence.

~Swampy Cree Elder and grandmother Joanne Dallaire



For the case of young girls, everyone in the community needs to be educated that if a girl wants to play sports she can still be a woman and doesn't have to be a "tom boy" to play sports. Challenging gender roles is very important.

~Ojibwe social work student and fitness trainer Michael Auksi, Ryerson University

Obviously, if you have bad habits, you're going to pass those bad habits on, but in my family, because my family including my siblings are very practiced in eating well and living well, I have a very fit, well family.

~Inuk singer, role model, and long-distance runner
Lucie Idlout

Physical activity doesn't have to be complicated. Both of us seem to enjoy walking with our children. In the city it's so accessible to be able to walk everywhere, like to go and get your groceries or to your local park, but in remote communities you can't always make it your goal of getting your groceries through walking. But then there's options for outdoor fun because you have more outdoor space and greenery and nature.

~First Nations mom and registered dietitian/fitness specialist
Kelly Gordon

Be a positive role model

Children are naturally active, and may even surprise you by how much exercise they're able to get in a day! Support their natural tendency to be active by giving them the chance to be active every day. You'll be a great encouragement to your children if you take action and do things with them.

Be active with your child. Help your child learn basic skills such as:

- throwing;
- catching;
- jumping; and
- climbing.

Encourage more outdoor play and activities. Take your child outside and have fun running, hopping, skipping, skating, cycling, dancing, or playing a game.

Build healthy habits such as keeping active and eating well, which last a lifetime.



I do local runs all the time. I bring them where there might be a 1 km walk, you know, just showing them 'cause kids do as they see and showing them that it's a part of my life and everyday life, it's not just like a little phase sort of thing. And then supporting them in whatever they do ... my son, it's pretty easy with him. It's all about hockey and if he's not doing that then we try to do something else. Just try to really stay interested and just keep their, you know, a hobby and focus on that as much as I would on mine and treat them as all equally important.

~First Nations mom and diabetes educator Melanie Francis,
M'Chigeeng Health Centre



Fun activities for all ages

This chapter gives you ideas on how to get active with:

- New babies and toddlers
- Preschool and kindergarten children

New babies and toddlers

Physical activity should start at (and before) birth. New babies don't move much, but some things you can do to help them get used to the idea of being active include;

- **Going for a walk outside at least once a day.** Use a stroller or a baby carrier. This is one of the easiest things you can do to help you get exercise. It also helps baby's brain develop since she'll be learning about all the colours and shapes outside.
- **Watching community events from a cradleboard.** Take baby to talent shows, pow wows, and other community events where he can see people getting active in cultural activities.
- **Going swimming.** Many people think it is important for babies to be in water. Babies spend about nine months growing in their mother's bag of water, so being in water can be a very comforting and healing experience for babies.
- **Going to exercise classes with mom or dad once baby's neck muscles develop.** These classes help you learn how to include your baby in your daily exercise routine.

We encourage him [her young grandson]... just lots of play, lots of exercise. He's been in the pool since he was two weeks old. Just always, he's got to have lots of exercise.

~Swampy Cree Elder and grandmother Joanne Dallaire

- **Setting up a water or sand table, or filling up a wagon with water or sand plus some toys.** If your child is just starting to stand, using a water or sand table helps encourage them to develop their leg muscles. Playing with water or sand is a relaxing experience and if done outside, this can be a relaxing yet active time to spend with your child.
- **Going jogging.** You may wish to buy a special jogging stroller to help you stay active while your baby or toddler still fits a stroller. Most young ones enjoy going jogging with their parents as they enjoy feeling the fresh air and looking at the streets, the trees, different faces, etc.
- **Riding on mom or dad's bike once baby is ready.** Check with your health care provider to ensure your baby is ready for riding with you. Ask about ways of finding a proper and safe helmet for you and your baby, as well as a baby seat for your little one.



I had a very simple life. I used to just enjoy going for walks with them in the woods. I used to love going in the woods on trails and nature stuff like that, going to the playground with them. We also went swimming a lot. We used to go skiing... we would go skiing as a family in the winter months. During the summer holidays we would go swimming with them, take them water skiing, we had a great life. I loved doing stuff with my kids, bike riding, I used to run through the Mount Pleasant Cemetery and they would ride along beside me. It was so much fun.

~Aboriginal midwife and mother Ellen Blais

Preschool and kindergarten children (ages 2.5 to 6 years)

Once your child is walking, some active things you can do include:

- **Biking:** Use a tricycle when they're young, move onto training wheels, and then eventually two-wheeler bikes as they grow.
- **Building an obstacle course indoors** using chairs, pillows, blankets, and other things when the weather isn't nice for outdoor play.
- **Doing role play games** where you act out the movements from different animals, different vehicles, etc.
- **Hiking** through your neighbourhood, park, etc.
- **Picking up garbage in your community:** Get exercise while teaching about your values for Mother Earth, but make sure to watch your child closely in case of broken glass, chemicals, etc.
- **Riding a horse**
- **Scooters and skateboard:** Children love wheels! There are different scooters for different ages.
- **Winter sports:** Learn to skate, trudge through the snow, learn to use snowshoes, build snowforts, etc.
- **Joining an organized sport** such as soccer, gymnastics, etc. While your child is young be careful about putting them into sports that focus too much on "sportsmanship." This can be a hard concept to grasp when you a very small child. Instead focus on giving your child the opportunity to explore whatever interests him or her, and don't worry if your child doesn't seem to keen on following rigid rules or expectations (Leach, 2000).

Bike riding is very, very important. I think it is important on so many levels, especially for children. I think it gives them independence. I think it teaches them about being mobile, being able to go from point A to point B by their own momentum and their own energy. I would love to be able to do bike riding... just staying active and really encouraging sports.

~Swampy Cree Elder and grandmother Joanne Dallaire



Did you know?

For safety tips on a wide range of topics, including bike helmets for children, you can visit www.safekidscanada.ca or call **1.888.SAFE.TIP (723.3847)**.

Fast fact: Move it to lose it

There are many easy activities you can do with your children to get your 60 minutes of physical activity every day. You can do 10 minutes at a time and build up to your 60 minutes to get health benefits. Place a check mark beside some of the simple activities you like to do every day.

- Bicycling at a leisurely pace
- Cleaning the house
- Dancing, not too fast, not too slow
- Hunting
- Lacrosse
- Jumping rope, not too fast
- Skating
- Skiing
- Swimming, leisurely
- Walking and playing with children

(Health Link BC, 2009)

You have to eat healthy, you have to exercise, that's all been said already. The restriction of kids being able to just go and play, that's hampering them. And also TV and computer games are keeping them on the couch, but that goes across the board for everybody.

~Elder Donelda DelaRonde,
Red Sky Métis Independent
Nation, Thunder Bay

A lot of the things that I learned as a kid stuck with me... I would say something like, "Yeah, junk food tastes good and it's all that but everything should be in moderation" and sometimes you could use an analogy like asking the kid what their favourite car is and if they say Ferrari you could tell them that Ferraris don't run on bronze, they use premium fuel and this is the kind of premium fuel you need. I would also role model the kids into having good eating habits and sleeping habits.

~Ojibwe social work student
and fitness trainer Michael
Auksi, Ryerson University

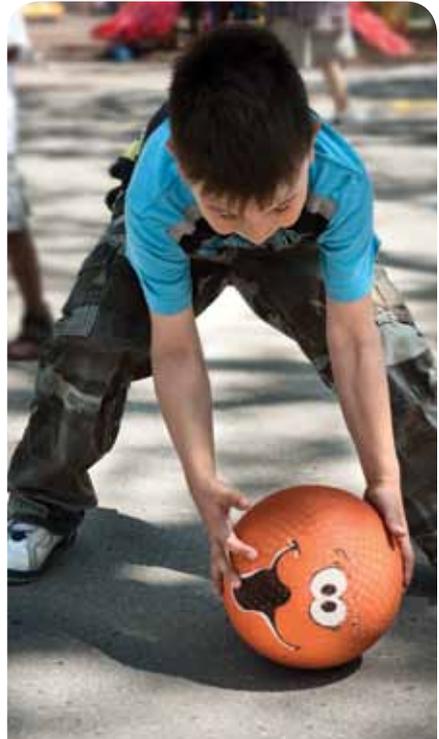
What you eat affects what you can do – understand your body

Our bodies are like machines. Food is our energy or fuel that helps our machines to run at their very best. The best foods for us are things that are healthy and high in nutrients such as vitamins and minerals. Nutrients go into our body and help us do things like running, walking, etc.

Here is a table showing nutrients and:

- How they affect your body
- What to eat or drink to get them (sources)

For more information on ideas on healthy eating, see our book called *Eating the Right Stuff*.



Nutrient	How it Affects your Body	Examples of Sources
Protein	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helps build and repair muscle tissue • Unlike fat, protein is not stored, whatever we have is always needed and at work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tuna • Chicken • Eggs • Greek yogurt • Tempeh • Almonds
Iron	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This nutrient helps children's brains to develop, and helps children learn • Enables the blood to carry oxygen throughout the body 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wholegrain cereals (check the label, some have little iron, and some have a lot of iron) • Pulses and legumes • Fish • Green leafy vegetables • Wild meat such as seal, duck or moose
Calcium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helps build strong bones and teeth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Green leafy vegetables • Dairy products • Salmon • Fortified orange juice or soy milk
Water	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regulates body temperature • Gets rid of waste products • Forms the basic structure of all our organs and cells • Makes it easier for your body to digest food • Acts as a shock absorber between the joints <p>Did you know? Our bodies are made up of around 70% water (York Region, 2010).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adults should drink about 6 to 8 glasses of water a day (including the fluids in fruits and vegetables) • Young children should drink about the same

If you or your child has health concerns, you should talk to a health care provider to ask about physical activity that is safe for you and your child.

Tip: Young children should be watching less than one to two hours of television each day (Canadian Paediatric Society, 2008). Less is more!



There is an Elder that comes into the program to do tobacco teachings. Spiritual healing with drumming and Elder teachings. Children love to hear stories and learn through things that they can relate to.

~First Nations mother and program coordinator Sabrina Boucher, Anishnawbe-Mushkiki, Thunder Bay

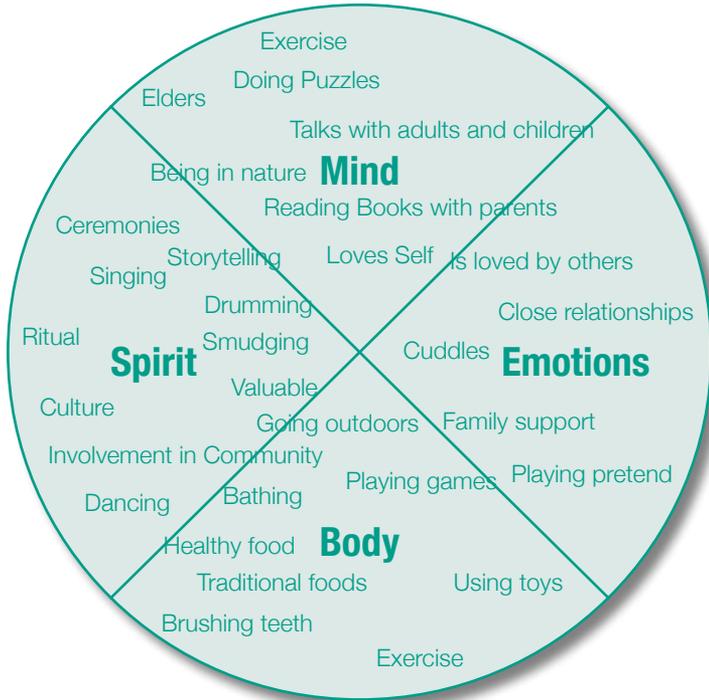
3 Cultural activities for the whole family

Physical activity doesn't just benefit your body. It helps your mind and spirit too!

Think about the Medicine Wheel. It shows how we need balance in all four parts of ourselves if we are going to be healthy: body, mind, spirit, and emotions.

Every season there's a shift that happens. There's a natural shift in Mother Earth. There's a natural shift in the human being. So those kinds of activities we do need to be done seasonally.

~Mohawk teacher Diane Longboat, Six Nations



Being active helps your spirit to stay happy and healthy. Your spirit is also nurtured when you do things that are a part of your ancestral ways of being. We need to stay active with our children all year, even if it's cold or rainy!

Aboriginal people have always been active until recent years when we started moving away from our

traditional lifestyles. Many parents now work long hours and don't have as much time to spend with their children as they would like. Some of us don't get as much active time as we would have if we had lived in the same ways as our ancestors. Many children are spending much of their free time in front of a television or computer.

Try some of the following activities to connect with your culture:

- **Learn about hunting**—children might be too young to shoot a gun, but they can come along for the hiking and for the observing parts of the hunt.
- **Learn about traditional medicines in your area**—ask an Elder or grandparent to take you hiking so you can learn how to gather different herbs, roots, etc.
- **Gather wood and make a camp fire**—everyone in the community needs to learn fire and water teachings, so making a camp fire gives you an opportunity to teach both about traditional gender roles, responsibilities, and fire safety. It also gives you a chance to explore the importance of trees to our past and future survival.
- **Start a garden**—this helps your child to get active while getting them to learn more about healthy eating. If you're in climate that doesn't support an outdoor garden, explore container gardening to grow things indoors.
- **Take your child dancing**—go to a drum social, a pow wow, Tunik time activities, jigging lessons, etc.

So many children are watching too much television and playing too many video games these days. If your child does these things, make it your goal to spend more time playing with your child one-on-one.

My grandfather was pretty... he's a pretty funny guy, old Métis guy. He was constantly kicking us out of the house to be active and I mean, this was St. Francis (in southern Manitoba), this is -32 Celcius and he'd still kick you out and we would go. We would go into the forest and we build... we would build forts and stuff. You feel exhilarated, 'cause you got out there and kinda challenged the weather. If you let them inside, they're going to immediately gravitate, especially in this day and age, to a video game, a TV, or a computer, one of those three things.

~Métis father Jeffrey Cyr,
Ottawa



Mix up your approach to having fun!

Try things like:

- Active board games like twister
- Hide and seek
- Making and moving through an obstacle course
- Scavenger hunts (where you hide an object outside and help your child to find it)

Due to the legacy of residential schools, many of us grew up with family relationships that may not have been very healthy. Some of us didn't have parents who played with us. If this was the case when you were growing up, pay attention to cues from your child, such as:

- Looking happy, joyful, or interested in what she is doing
- Concentrating on the tasks at hand, even if she's a young toddler who can only concentrate for a minute or two at a time



Children carry such powerful medicine into the family that the children are really the change agents of the family. It's not the parents, it's the children.

~Mohawk teacher Diane Longboat, Six Nations

- Asking questions, or sharing her thoughts about the things you're doing and learning together

Support your child at play by trying some or all of the following:

- **Give her lots of time and space**—young children are often most interested in exploring the world at their own pace. It's awesome to take them out to a park or playground, but make sure to give them ample time to explore all that they want and need.
- **Help her**—you might have stronger muscles, and be more able to balance a ball or a bucket of water than your young child. Offer to help her in her adventures as often as you can. Give her a smile so she sees you enjoying yourself!
- **Don't put your own expectations on their play**—your child has an active imagination, so let her be the leader.

One book I recommend for parents looking for some good tips on play and early childhood development is *Your Baby and Child: From Birth to Age Five*, by Penelope Leach. Although it was originally published in 1977, this book stands the test of time. This book has loads of nice photos and so many great ideas on how to help my small son develop in a good way. Many of the ideas respect the fact that many parents are on a tight budget. I got my copy from a thrift store, and so many other moms have seen this book on my shelf and said how useful they found it as well.

~Ojibwe/Sioux mom Melanie Ferris

“Physical skills acquired before a child is about seven years old are seldom completely lost... your three- or four-year old can certainly learn to swim, for example—the earlier, the better. She can master a two-wheeler with patient help and she can learn basic playground games—like hopscotch, skipping, and a range of ball games” (Leach, 2000).

Enjoy your time playing with your child, knowing that all the healthy habits you help them develop in their early years are going to help them their entire lives! Take the time during your child’s early life to build a strong attachment and emotional bond with your child through play.

When I became pregnant, I finally joined my first co-ed gym in my life. I committed myself to passing healthy habits to my son from the day he was born. Exercise is now a normal part of our every day life, and I know it helps me be a better mother for Tarig. I don't think he'll ever struggle with his weight, so that's one less thing to worry about!

~Ojibwe/Sioux mom and health promotion consultant, Melanie Ferris



Kids used to be more active, go outside, run outside. When I was little we went outside at recess no matter if it was snowing.

~Aboriginal artist Miche Jette, communications officer at the Aboriginal Healing Foundation



4 Staying active wherever you live

Many people say that children are less active now because their parents are concerned about safety. Some common safety concerns include:

- Wild dogs or animals being around outdoor spaces
- Not having an outdoor play space that is suitable (such as a balcony or a yard)
- Strangers interacting or approaching your child
- Gangs or others approaching or hurting you when you're with your child
- Busy roads and streets that are unsafe for children

When your child is small, make time to be active both in and outdoors. Plan for your safety so you can enjoy your life with your child to its fullest. Keep reading for some ideas on how to plan for safety.

Parents need to play with their children... remember the importance of role modeling and playing... make things fun for your children. I had a client who was trying to get her kid to work out for 45 minutes a day on a stationary bike... it might not be that fun for the child.

~First Nations mother, registered dietitian, and fitness specialist, Kelly Gordon





Be active, be safe

Being active is great, but remember that safety comes first. Consider the following ideas when you're getting active by yourself or with children:

- **Always wear a properly fitted helmet** when cycling, skateboarding, rollerblading, or going skating.
- **Supervise!** You know your child the best. Young children between the ages of 0 and 6 are generally going to need a lot of supervision. Make sure to pay attention and model safe habits with your child.
- **Wear proper footwear.** You could hurt your toes if you wear sandals or other open-toe shoes when you're doing different sports.
- **Where clothes that fit properly**—ensure that legs can't get tangled in pants or skirts that are too long, ensure the same for your hands as well.



- **Wear glasses** if you need to see where you are going.
- **Wear goggles** or other eye protection for sports that could hurt the eyes—this includes things like squash, hockey, swimming (for some people), etc.
- **Use an approved lifejacket** if canoeing or boating.
- **Always tell someone where you are going** and when you expect to be back—if you get lost on a hike or something, it's good if someone knows where you have gone off to.
- **Have an escape plan** if a wild dog were trying to attack you in your yard. Do you have something to help defend yourself against a dog?



When I was a child, I'd go out and my dad would say, "Go out and play," and I'd take my bike and go running around the neighbourhood, and he wasn't there watching me. He'd want me to come home at a certain time, and there were a lot of kids like that. I don't think things are quite the same any more. So, I think that's part of the problem too.

*~Métis college instructor
Cory Koski, Red Sky Métis
Independent Nation*

- **Check yourself and your children for ticks** when you come inside from playing in a wooded area.
- **Wear sunscreen and sunhats** when you are playing in the hot sun, or try to avoid the times when the sun is at it's hottest by going out early in the morning or later in the afternoon.
- **Tell babysitters or other people** taking care of your children about any safety concerns and plans that you have.
- **Get yourself a good first aid kit.** If you attend any programs like a Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program, ask your program coordinator to organize a session explaining how to make your own first aid kit and what to do with the things in there if you have any accidents.
- **Be active in your community!** If you have friends and other supports in your community, you'll be building up allies who will help you to be safe with your child where you live. To see how building community helps us to get active, check out our book called *Creating Healthier Communities*.
- **If you're feeling unsafe getting to and from any programs:**
 - Ask a friend for a ride.
 - Develop a "buddy" system where you and a friend check in with each other, walk with each other, etc.

Activities for people with disabilities

In our communities, many people have limitations on what their bodies can do. Some of us have visual impairments while others deal with issues connected to diabetes, such as having amputated limbs or less mobility than other people.

Even if you have a disability, it's still important to get physical activity every day. An active lifestyle is very important for anyone with a disability because it helps you to have better overall health, improved quality of life, better self-esteem, prolonged independent living in later life, and more mobility (Active Living Alliance, 2010). Pick something that you like to do, that you're able to do, and do it!



If you're unable to play with your child because of a disability or other issue, enlist the help of the people in your family and your community. Try to ensure that your child has access to activity every day, even if you are not able to be with him.

You may be surprised to find that your community has a wide range of resources to help you and/or your child get active. Check out some of the organizations listed in **Chapter 5: Free things to try.**

I'll go into a really big Wal-Mart store, just go up and down the aisles. As long as I'm holding onto a cart I could walk forever, so I'll do that just to get exercise. And with my grandson I can take him in his stroller and then I'm fine. But to walk just from here to the cafeteria I have to stop a couple of times because my back will seize up. That's what I teach people who lives in the city—you know, just go! Go! Go to a mall, just walk through it. You don't have to buy anything. It really helps the time go.

~Swampy Cree Elder and grandmother Joanne Dallaire

Places that can help

- Active Living Alliance for Canadians with a Disability
- Alberta Centre for Active Living
- Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada
- Children's aid agencies—many of these are meant to support Aboriginal parents, so it's worth checking if they have any special programs to support children with disabilities
- Variety Village
- YMCAs—these have a mandate to help people with disabilities
- Other charities such as the Canadian Diabetes Association

It is great if you're able to find good mentors or role models for your child. If your child has mobility issues, see if there is another person in your community who can spend time with your child to encourage her and support her.



What if my child has ADHD or Autism?

Every child deserves the right to play. If your child has been diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) or Autism Spectrum Disorder, your child might show some of the following symptoms:

- poor concentration;
- restless behaviour;
- a poor sense of what is safe and unsafe;
- find it hard to relate to others; and
- many other things.

You may find it challenging to get your child engaged in team sports, but you may have more luck playing one-on-one with your child. Research shows that children with these issues benefit from regular physical activity (Roberts, 2008).

If your child has either disorder or any other challenge, it's important to communicate with any of his care providers. Make sure any teacher or coach knows about your child's health so that she knows what to expect and can think about the best ways of supporting your child (Roberts, 2008).

Starting your own physical activity program

Starting a program can be fun! If your community doesn't have any programs that interest you then you should think about starting your own program. It can be fun and easy to get active if you have a group working together towards the same goal. Starting your own program could be as simple as getting a group of friends for community walks or even for growing a garden together.

When we see things wrong in our community, and we say, "Why did this fall apart? Why is this happening?" We should find out. We should get our feet dirty.... and it's unpaid, right? It's typically all volunteer, not glamorous. I think more of us have to be involved.

~Métis professor Dr. Lynn Lavallée, Ryerson University

The community was a big help, especially when I was a single parent. It was a big help because they actually employed me one year to teach jigging and during the jigging the program consisted of having a meal. They were able to pay me and provided child care for those whose kids were really small or whose kids lost interest, you know, half way through the session. So that was something, I could fit my life around it and include my kids if I wanted to.

~Métis mother to three, Jaime Koebel, jigger, artist, and fiddler



Think about what action you can take to get things happening in your community. If you'd like to start a group fitness or sports program, here are some questions to discuss with your friends:

- Do we need any special equipment? If yes, how can we get it (ie; through donations from businesses, through the Band council, renting from a local gym, at the friendship centre, etc.)?
- Do we need any special indoor or outdoor space?
- Do we want to open this up to whoever wants to join us, or keep it to a small group of friends and family?
- Do we want to do an activity that includes our children, or do we want to hire a babysitter or child care provider for our workout sessions?
- How many times a week should we get together? (Remember, it's best for adults to get 60 minutes of physical activity everyday!)
- Is there anything else that we should consider, such as having a meal together or a seasonal party to celebrate our accomplishments?
- What are the gaps in our community? Do our children have enough access to cultural activities? If no, what steps can we take to get them more active in doing cultural things?



Programs... are very good for kids. I know a lot of people who've gone through them, and it's provided them some social and emotional structure. It promotes a healthier lifestyle. I know we have dragon boat races. I don't know how much kids are involved with those, but there's a variety of different outdoor activities, especially in the summer, that parents and children have access to.

~Métis college instructor Cory Koski, Red Sky Métis Independent Nation



5 Free things to try

You know your child the best so it's up to you to help your child get access to the things that she loves to do. Many programs and services that can help you and your child in getting more physical activity, including the following:

Aboriginal health access centres

are across the province. Many of them organize traditional ceremonies and activities. Even if they don't have anything that they call "physical activity," use these centres to help you get some ideas on what types of programs are available in your community. You can also access health care providers at these centres to help you address any health concerns before you start a physical activity program.

Web: www.ahwsontario.ca/programs/hacc.html

Phone: 416.326.6907
(funder's office)

Active Living Alliance for Canadians with a Disability

is a national network that helps to motivate and assist Canadians with a disability to become more physically active.

Web: www.ala.ca

Phone: 1.800.771.0663 (toll free),
613.244.0052 (in Ottawa),
or 1.888.771.0663 (TTY)



Alberta Centre for Active Living

has a good list of different services and resources that you might find helpful if you or your child has a disability.

Web: www.centre4activeliving.ca/resources.cgi?s=5;d=1

Phone: 780.427.6949

Big Brother Big Sisters is a program to check out if you're a single mom or dad and need some more support. These programs match children with an older volunteer "sibling." A big brother or sister engage with young children in an active way, which may be also very helpful if you have a physical disability.

Web: www.bigbrothersbigsisters.ca

on has a list of agencies in Ontario
Phone: 1.800.263.9133 (toll free)
or 905.639.0461 (in Toronto area)

Children's aid societies may have programs to help Aboriginal children or parents with a disability. There are some Aboriginal Children's aid societies in Ontario.

Web: <http://www.oacas.org/childwelfare/locate.htm>

Community Action Program for Children (CAPC) is a community-based children's program that promotes the healthy development of young children (0-six years). Supports and activities are available to children and their families. Some programs provide services specifically for Aboriginal families.

Web: www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/hp-ps/dca-dea/prog-ini/capc-pace/index-eng.php has a list of sites across Ontario

Phone: 807.344.9006
(in the Thunder Bay area)
or 1.800.361.0563 (toll free)

Dietitians of Canada has a wide range of resources listed on this webpage. Check out the information about healthy eating and healthy weights for children.

Web: www.dietitians.ca/Dietitians-Views/Children-and-Teens/Overview.aspx

Dilico Anishinabek Family Care provides a range of programs for Anishinabek people by promoting wellness. Dilico's programs and services are available for Anishinabek residents of any age in Dilico's jurisdiction, and for children in the care of Dilico and their caregivers.

Web: www.dilico.com

Phone: 807.623.8511
(in Thunder Bay area)
or 1.800.465.3985 (toll free)

Eat Right Ontario is a great resource for parents. You can call a toll-free number five days a week to get advice and resources on healthy living from a registered dietitian.

Web: www.eatrightontario.ca

Phone: 1.877.510.510.2
between the hours of 9am to 5pm (EST), Monday to Friday. The call centre is also open until 9pm on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Friendship centres are across the province. Many have classes where you can learn traditional dancing, martial arts, etc. Many centres design programs to include the entire family or they may also provide child care if you're taking an adult class.

Web: www.ofifc.org has a list of friendship centres in Ontario

Phone: 416.956.7575
(general office)

Have a Ball Together is a website where you can get tips for getting active with your young child. The website also has resources you can download that were made for and tested by Aboriginal parents in Ontario.

Web: www.haveaballtogether.ca/

Head Start programs are for children 2 to 6 years across Ontario. These free programs are supposed to have a physical activity component and also should provide access to good nutrition for your young child.

Web: www.letsbehealthy.ca

Phone: 416.973.0002
(Public Health Agency of Canada)
or 613.946.9744 (Health Canada)

Invest in Kids has a bunch of ideas for active play with your baby, toddler, and preschooler.

Ottawa Inuit Children's Centre

has a variety of programs available to help Inuit children (up to age 13) and their families in Ottawa.

Web:

www.ottawainuitchildrens.com/eng/

Phone: 613.744.3133

Public Health Agency of Canada

publishes *Canada's Physical Activity Guide for Children*. The guide has information and tips to help children and youth understand the importance of daily physical activity, and make informed decisions about taking steps to become more active.

Web: www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/hp-ps/hl-mvs/pag-gap/cy-ej/pdf/guide-keng.pdf

Phone: 1.888.334.9769

to order a free copy of the guide

Recreation centres across Ontario have subsidized, low-cost, or free memberships that give you access to group classes, gym equipment, swimming pools, etc.

Web: There is no central list. Try using www.google.com and type in "Recreation centre+" the name of your city or location to find the centre nearest you.

Variety Village is a place to get fit and have fun in Toronto. The village is available to people of all abilities.

Web: www.varietylvillage.ca

Phone: 416.699.7167

Walk this Way is a self-help

walking program for Aboriginal adults who want to start walking to improve their health. You can get your free copy by downloading it from the Internet or by phoning the Physical Activity Resource Centre.

Web: parc.ophea.net/resources

Phone: 416.426.7120

YMCAs across Ontario provide subsidized memberships for people with a low income. Many have instructional classes for young children, along with opportunities for social development. YMCAs also have a mandate to help people with physical disabilities.

Web: www.ymca.ca to search for a location near you.

Phone: 416.967.9622 (Head office)





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*A wide range of traditional teachings were gathered from our key informants and advisory members for this project. You can find their names listed at the front of this book and online at www.letsbehealthy.ca.

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