



Linda Knoblauch
Community Development Coordinator
City of St. Albert Family & Community Support Services
201, 8 Perron Street St. Albert, AB T8N 1E4
Phone 780-459-1720 Fax 780-458-1260
lknoblauch@st-albert.net
www.stalbertfcss.ca

never underestimate the power of caring

Motivating Couch Potato Kids

Lack of activity destroys the good condition of every human being, while movement and methodical physical exercise save it and preserve it.

Plato, Classical Greek philosopher

As summer break approaches, kids can be easily tempted into increasing their sedentary activities—surfing the Internet, texting friends, watching TV shows and movies, and playing video games. It's important, however, to find a balance so that kids are doing both and getting the physical health benefits of regular exercise.

Tips for . . .

All parents

- Talk to your kids about why exercise is important. Kids are more likely to do something if they understand why it's good for them.
- Set a good example. Exercise with your kids. If that isn't possible, model what you value by getting involved in some type of physical activity. Stick with it and talk about it.
- Encourage your kids to try different forms of physical activity. Exercise isn't fun if it's boring—or if it becomes a chore. Keep trying different types of exercise until your child finds something that interests her.
- As children get older, have them help out with physical chores that give them some exercise. Starting around age 6, kids can help wash the car. Middle school kids can mow the lawn and shovel snow. High school teens can help move furniture and do heavier yard work.
- Set clear guidelines. Make exercise part of your child's daily routine. If your child doesn't have time (or isn't interested), cut back on video games and other sedentary activities.

Parents with children ages birth to 5

- Incorporate movement into your daily routine. Play games of chase (which children love) to get them running. Dance to music.
- Make activity fun. Go to the playground together. Follow your child through the playground equipment. If you don't fit in the equipment, walk around so that you get some get exercise while your child plays.
- Go for walks. Look for bugs. Pick up leaves. Getting your child used to taking walks at an early age will pay off over the long haul.

Parents with children ages 6 to 9

- Encourage kids to try different sports to see what interests them. Children at this age can benefit from playing soccer or basketball, participating in gymnastics or martial arts, or doing other age-appropriate sports.
- Emphasize the fun aspects of sports and physical activity. Children are more likely to stick with an activity if they really enjoy it.
- Help kids learn to ride a two-wheeled bicycle, swim, and do other physical activity that requires some skill mastery.

Parents with children ages 10 to 15

- At this age, some kids gravitate toward being sedentary. Encourage them to find a physical activity they enjoy, such as walking around the neighborhood with a friend. Or encourage them to take an exercise class with a friend or family member.
- Some kids at this age begin to master a physical activity, especially if they've played it for a number of years. Encourage them to go deeper into the sport.
- As kids get older, they can begin to explore other physical activities, such as racquetball and kickboxing. Keep introducing them to new physical activities to try.

Parents with children ages 16 to 18

- Continue to support your older teenager as he participates in sports.
- Encourage teens to find new physical activities that they enjoy, such as jogging or video games that get them to move. See if they're interested in taking an exercise class.
- Talk about how it's never too late to start exercising. Sometimes an older teenager who has lost interest in physical activity will find a new interest in exercise. Encourage your child to deepen her interest.
- For kids who claim that they're "not athletes" and "can't compete" with classmates, make the case that everyone benefits from exercise. Help teenagers find individual activities (such as jogging or walking on a treadmill) that keep them physically active without competition.

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