



# Active Play

For better Childhood Health  
and Learning



# Contents

About Active Play	Page 3
Our story	Page 4
Why now?	Page 5
Evidence Base	Page 6
How Active Play Works	Page 9
Our Evidence & Further Reading	Page 11



# About Active Play

Active Play is an evidence-based programme that effectively helps children be more physically active.

It supports children's emotional, social and cognitive development. Research has shown that children who are physically active are more likely to have a healthier lifestyle and learn better, as they grow older.

Designed to be fun, inclusive and active, Active Play is a straightforward and inexpensive programme to implement.

It contributes directly to the Curriculum for Excellence's health and wellbeing outcomes, Scotland's Mental Health Strategy, Health Improvement goals and the Active Scotland Framework.

Active Play is a 15-week programme, combining semi-structured games and unstructured free play, delivered outdoors by local play specialists.

Active Play develops children's fundamental movement skills including running, jumping, throwing and catching.

Children's physical literacy is developed through Active Play by building their competence, confidence, motivation through playing more and being more physically active.

Active Play also builds positive relationships between the children and adults engaged in delivery. Within schools these improved relationships have led to better classroom behaviour and supported learning.

At the end of the programme adults have the confidence, ability and resources to continue Active Play within their settings and with the use of the online Actify resource, toolkits, videos and additional training have continued support as part of the Active Play network.



**"Play is the foundation of a healthy, happy future for all of us, which is why we want to make play a fundamental part of growing up in Scotland".** Celia Tennant, Chief Executive, Inspiring Scotland

# Our Story

Pioneered by Glasgow charities PEEK and Agile in 2014, the programme was then developed by Inspiring Scotland and partners as part of the Go2Play Fund. In 2016, Inspiring Scotland partnered with charities PEEK, FARE and The Jeely Piece Club to deliver Active Play to Glasgow City Council Education Services as part of the Attainment Challenge. Active Play has now been delivered in every primary school in Glasgow with many schools using Pupil Equity Funding to roll out the programme on a whole-school basis.

In 2017, we extended the programme to Dundee and the Highlands, and to West Dunbartonshire and North Lanarkshire in 2019. More recently Active Play has been developed across nursery and community settings whilst taking a whole-school approach through the support of the Scottish Government's Active Scotland Division.

Active Play has been researched and evaluated by the University of Strathclyde, Arrivo, FMR Research and Glasgow University.

A partnership with Active Scotland has expanded the Active Play programme in 2022 to schools, nurseries, and communities across the Highlands enabling more adults responsible for children to develop the knowledge and confidence to deliver Active Play to more children. In 2023/24 we will be developing Active Play for Additional Support Needs in Glasgow and will be part of a Glasgow University Research study.

Thanks to all partners and investors for their continued support, including Scottish Government, Active Scotland Division, Glasgow City Council Education Department, Glasgow University, PEPASS, Strathclyde University.



# Why Now?

There are health issues related to low physical activity which have serious implications for our children.

## Children are lonely and disconnected



Screen time is much higher in the more socioeconomically deprived individuals, aggregated screen time data from HSBC 2018 on recreational screen time on weekdays is around **9** hours/day in boys and around **8** hours/day in girls and these values have increased over time as a secular trend.

## Poorer Physical Health



**28%** of children in Scotland are at risk of being overweight or obese. Inactive children are more likely to develop diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, asthma, arthritis, bone fractures, and suffer from poor mental health.

**£91m** is the annual cost to the NHS in Scotland of physical inactivity.

## Increased Inequality



**87%** of children living in areas of deprivation in Scotland are not meeting the physical activity guidelines. The minimum is just 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous activity per day

## Poorer Mental Well Being



**27%** of seven-year-olds in Scotland have low social and emotional wellbeing.

The average young person only spends around **1 hour** (68 mins) of their day outdoors.

More than **86%** of young people agree that being outdoors in nature makes them very happy.



## Heightened Social Anxiety

Since lockdown, children have lost friendship groups and the skills to socialise with peers.



## Inability to focus

Children's ability to concentrate and focus on learning has decreased since the pandemic.



## Children need to play

Play is recognised as a child's fundamental right in Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. As a nation, our government and academia now acknowledge the developmental, health and wellbeing benefits of engaging in play throughout childhood.



# Evidence Base

We have supported thousands of children to be more active since 2014. Our teacher and adult feedback, academic research and independent evaluation provides a robust evidence base.

## The Evidence for Active Play is robust

Our PHD researcher used actigraphs on pupils participating in Active Play, in 4 different locations over a period of 10 weeks. This research showed those participating in active play benefited from more moderate to vigorous physical activity than all other control groups.

A separate study concluded there was a long-term positive impact of moderate to vigorous physical activity (MVPA) on academic attainment.

**30.1%**

During an hour-long session of Active Play, 30.1% of the time is spent in MVPA, compared to 11.4% in a PE class (an increase of 264%).



**95%**

95% had fun at Active Play

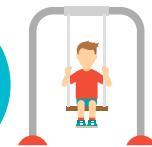


Sedentary behaviour in school reduced while participating in Active Play



**92%**

92% of children play more outside of school following Active Play



**86%**

86% of children taking part said they liked doing physical activities more than they used to following Active Play



Children were more likely to take part in afterschool sports clubs if they participated in Active Play.



Active time in the school day is increased while participating in Active Play



Teachers report children being more attentive, better behaved and engaged in class following Active Play



The top 3 things about Active Play – Seeing the children having fun, all children participating and spending time with staff in a fun environment”

**Class Teacher**

“My understanding and confidence has grown delivering Active Play sessions and I will continue to deliver these sessions now that I am more confident”

**Support For Learning Worker**

“I would recommend active play to all teachers. My students loved it and the benefits were immediate, far reaching and long lasting”

**Class Teacher**

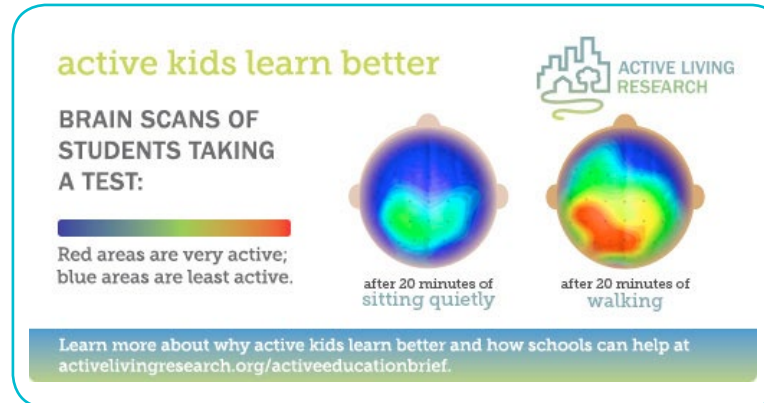
“Can we race? I never used to be fast or like running but I’ve now joined a running club and I enjoy it!” **Pupil**

“Children are more engaged, willing and focused due to the physical activities in the Active Play sessions”

**Class Teacher**

“This has been an excellent programme for both children and adults alike. The children are more focussed after an Active Play Session and are playing better with each other in the class and in the playground. Staff don’t need to intervene as much to sort our squabbles, as the children have learned to compromise, problem solve and negotiate. My staff have also learned so much and are confident about taking Active Play forward in our school”

**Head Teacher**



“Active Play has been fantastic for the children getting to see them in an outdoor setting, and the freedom it brings has made me think of more outdoor activity for the class. It’s been great having the support to play actively outdoors even for just that 1 hour every week”

**Class Teacher**

“The children’s confidence has grown and inclusion is more visible. Observations include teamwork, listening and engagement in the children. Active Play has been a fantastic resource for the children and staff.”

**Principle Teacher**

“The Active Play sessions have helped me notice what the wee man is able to do. He was having such a laugh it made me join in more often with him”

**Parent**

“The children are willing to have a go at every session which is contributing to improved fitness”

**Class Teacher**

"I feel active play is a great way to keep this age range of children physically active in a way that's enjoyable and fun. Children are provided with so much technology nowadays and Active Play is vital to show playing outdoors is fun"

**Early Years Worker**

"When I played at play time nobody played with me, children now play with me and I have so much fun at Active Play and playtime"

**Child**

**Teaching staff have identified the following skill development in children participating in Active Play**

Communication

Creative

Team Work

Cooperation

Risk Taking

Problem Solving

Physical fitness

Emotional Reliance

"Lots of children are now able to do more activities, have improved skills, better teamwork and paired games."

**Play Worker**

"It has made me excited about coming to school on a Friday. I think it has been really nice of you to teach us lots of new games that I can play with my friends in school and at home."

**Child**

"I've definitely seen an improvement in children's confidence especially during the free play."

**Class Teacher**

"I have really enjoyed and benefitted from observing the active play staff delivering inputs and having the opportunity to deliver them myself. They are really good at what they do and worked hard over the duration of their time with the children to improve their health and wellbeing"

**Class Teacher**

"Active Play has been great for this class they are more concentrated when in class after their session and at lunchtime it is nice to see the children playing in larger groups now."

**Support For Learning Worker**

"The kids are more active, more confident, more interactive and more tolerant of each other."

**Class Teacher**

"Charity Play Leaders taught children to feel their heart after games to feel if their "heart is happy". This promoted the children to also understand the importance of getting physically active to keep their bodies healthy."

**Class Teacher**



# How Active Play Works

## Active Play is simple

Led by a trained play worker, a group of children take part in a one-hour session which combines semi-structured games and activities and unstructured child-led outdoor play.

Active Play increases a child's physical activity in a way which is fun and inclusive.

It gives school, nursery staff and parents/carers the skillset to improve health and wellbeing and connect with their children through outdoor play.

The games are designed to help the children develop their fundamental movement skills like running, jumping, throwing, catching as well as raising their levels of MVPA.

**Active Play amplifies the link between physical activity, mental alertness and cognitive development with fun, creative and cooperative games.**

The games also help children build important skills and attributes such as confidence, teamwork, risk assessment, problem solving and emotional resilience.

After eight weeks of delivery, the class teacher, or nursery practitioner is encouraged to take a lead in the sessions, supported by the Play worker.

Our research is backed up by studies from USA, Canada and Scandinavia which demonstrate the importance of outdoor physically active play in aiding a child's mental development, boosting cognitive ability, academic achievement, imagination, creativity and social skills.  
'Inspiring Scotland's play fund is developing a vision for Scotland where its children will be the healthiest in the world, both physically and mentally.'

**Let the Children Play, Pasi Sahlberg and William Doyle**

'In social play children learn how to negotiate with others, how to please others, and how to modulate and overcome anger that can arise from conflicts.'

**Free to Learn, Peter Gray**

**Physical**  
Stronger bones and heart  
Weight control  
Improved quality of life  
Increased fitness

**Social**  
Build social skills  
Make new friends  
Meet new people  
Social integration

**Cognitive**  
Increased decision making  
Improved concentration  
Improved problem solving  
Improved academic performance

**Emotional**  
Improved self-esteem  
Reduced anxiety and depression  
Improved self-confidence  
Reduced stress



# The Active Play Partnership:

- Inspiring Scotland Thrive Outdoors team provide leadership, coordination, programme evaluation, charity selection, contract management and partner support.
- Our partner, Actify, manage the induction and ongoing CPD with schools, nurseries and community settings, and provide the charities with CPD to deliver quality Active Play sessions. Actify has also developed an excellent online resource

[www.actify.org.uk/activeplay](http://www.actify.org.uk/activeplay) which provides setting adults with additional tools for delivery.

- Our charity partners are trusted local community-based charities. The play workers have an invaluable insight into the needs of our children. They act as trusted ambassadors and enthusiastic role models, confident in working in schools, nurseries and communities with families and children.

## Join us

We believe in the power of outdoor play to improve the life chances of Scotland's children.

Our children's health and happiness are fundamental to a successful present and future.

We want to help more people who work with children to support better health, wellbeing and learning for each and every child. We want to get it right for every child.

Active Play is proven to be effective in supporting children's health and wellbeing and their cognitive and emotional development. It is easy and inexpensive to implement. Importantly, it is fun and children readily engage with it.

We want to make Active Play a fundamental part of every child's day in Scotland.

### Join Us

**Email:** [thrive@inspiringscotland.org.uk](mailto:thrive@inspiringscotland.org.uk)

**Twitter:** @Thrive\_Outdoors

**Facebook:** @ThriveOutdoorsScot



# Our Evidence, Further Reading and Listening

- Active Play <https://www.actify.org.uk/activeplay>
- Huff and Puff with Active Play, 2022 [https://soundcloud.com/user-458093544/huff-and-puff-with-active-play-full-episode?si=e64c12f55186464eb8427fa93baab8a1&utm\\_source=clipboard&utm\\_medium=text&utm\\_campaign=social\\_sharing](https://soundcloud.com/user-458093544/huff-and-puff-with-active-play-full-episode?si=e64c12f55186464eb8427fa93baab8a1&utm_source=clipboard&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=social_sharing)
- I'm a teacher, get me outside, 2023 [https://open.spotify.com/episode/2ifVIDBmue6HoAOevOs40V?si=3ea6889acdbc406f&fbclid=IwAR0pPuQL\\_PxtluXpUbJiV334jO-ZSKMx96X-tob16t5kbLOCG1kVVVbQtmM&nd=1](https://open.spotify.com/episode/2ifVIDBmue6HoAOevOs40V?si=3ea6889acdbc406f&fbclid=IwAR0pPuQL_PxtluXpUbJiV334jO-ZSKMx96X-tob16t5kbLOCG1kVVVbQtmM&nd=1)
- UK Chief Medical Officers Physical Activity Guidelines [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/832868/uk-chief-medical-officers-physical-activity-guidelines.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/832868/uk-chief-medical-officers-physical-activity-guidelines.pdf)
- Active Play Evaluation report April 2016, Arrivo Consulting <https://bit.ly/2GOWaDh>
- Evaluation of Go2play Active Play programme in Glasgow 2016, Blake Stevenson <https://bit.ly/2H6SGMD>
- The challenge of childhood obesity, British Heart Foundation <https://bit.ly/2LralSu>
- Active Healthy Kids Scotland Scorecard [www.activehealthykidsscotland.co.uk](http://www.activehealthykidsscotland.co.uk)
- The Scottish Health Survey <https://www.gov.scot/collections/scottish-health-survey/>
- Johnstone (2016). Active play, physical activity and fundamental movement skills literature review. University of Strathclyde <https://www.inspiringscotland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Active-Play-Literature-Review-April-2016.pdf>

## References

- 1 Active Healthy Kids Report Card: Spotlight on Inequality, Active Healthy Kids Global Alliance, 2021
- 2 Evidence for environmental interventions to prevent childhood overweight and obesity within schools, Public Health Scotland, 2017
- 3 Active Healthy Kids Report Card: Spotlight on Inequality, Active Healthy Kids Global Alliance, 2021
- 4 GROWING UP IN SCOTLAND: Children's social, emotional, and behavioural characteristics at entry to primary school, Scottish Government, 2010
- 5 The Children's People and Nature Survey, 2021
- 6 Johnstone (2016). Active play, physical activity, and fundamental movement skills literature review. University of Strathclyde





**INSPIRING** SCOTLAND

**Thrive**  
**outdoors**  
For a sustainable Scotland, where our children and young people can play, learn and thrive outdoors

**active**  
**play**

Inspiring Scotland Registered Suite 2, 14 New Mart Road, Edinburgh, EH14 1RL.  
Inspiring Scotland is A Company Limited by Guarantee registered in Scotland, No. SC342436, and a registered Scottish charity, No. SC039605.