

ACTION STEPS FOR CHILD CARE PROVIDERS: MEETING BEST PRACTICES IN PHYSICAL ACTIVITY



Go NAPSACC — short for Go Nutrition and Physical Activity Self-Assessment for Child Care — is a trusted, no-cost tool available to Michigan child care providers. This online program guides simple policy, practice, and environment improvements that help promote healthier outcomes for children in early care and education (ECE) centers.

Each change supported by Go NAPSACC is based on best practice recommendations. These are research-proven, outcome-supported strategies to **achieve high-quality child care** and **desired health outcomes**, such as lowering risk of obesity and associated chronic diseases and supporting childhood growth and development. They also align with multiple licensing and accreditation performance standards.

“**Action Steps for Child Care Provides: Meeting Best Practices in Physical Activity**” is a resource that **highlights simple and concrete action steps** that ECE programs can take to achieve each of the best practices listed in **three Go NAPSACC modules**:



Infant & Child
Physical Activity



Outdoor Play &
Learning



Screen Time

This resource is not meant to replace any part of Go NAPSACC. Rather, it can be used as a brainstorming tool and companion to Go NAPSACC’s planning guide.

Before using this resource, make sure you:

- Read MSU Extension’s Go NAPSACC Starter Guide.
- Contact a MI Go NAPSACC consultant to set up your free account.
- Complete the online self-assessments to identify where your program is meeting best practices and where it still has room for improvement.

Using the outcomes of your self-assessment(s), you are ready to start using this resource to identify concrete, practical steps your ECE program can take to promote the physical activity of children in your care.

Who is this resource for?

Anyone at a child care program can work to follow recommended practices in order to support the health of the infants, toddlers, and preschoolers in their care. Change champions may be:

- Directors
- Teachers
- Food service staff
- Family (home-based) child care providers
- Center-based child care providers

Tips for using this resource

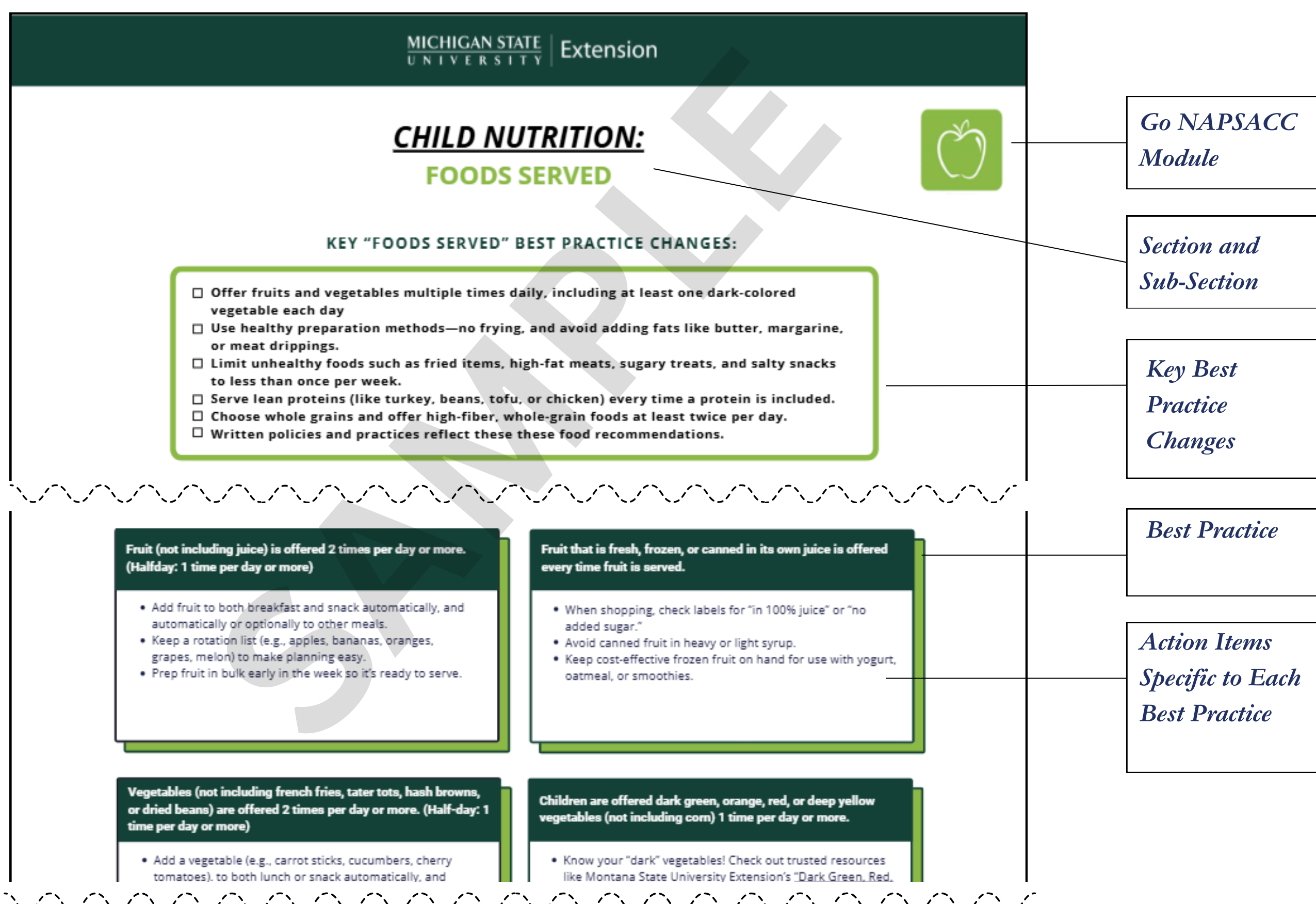
- Read one section at a time, starting with the topic introduction and “Key Best Practice Changes” highlighted at the beginning of the section.
- Circle 1–2 “Key Best Practice Changes.” These are high-impact changes that can help you meet more than one best practice at a time.
- Find more details and practical action steps in the “Best Practice” boxes related to the “Key Best Practice Changes” of your choice.

How to navigate this guide

There are four sections to this guide:

- Section 1 of 3: Infant and Child Physical Activity
- Section 2 of 3: Outdoor Play and Learning
- Section 3 of 3: Screen Time

Use the graphic below to understand the layout of the three sections:



Beyond this resource

The action ideas proposed here are only a few of the possibilities you can try. You might find additional ideas and innovations that are good fits for your program. Find more resources on these topics from MSU Extension and other trusted sources to help you make healthy changes in the [Healthier Child Care Environments Toolkit](#). It lists free, practical resources for providers, children, and families and touches upon topics of nutrition, physical activity, and social emotional health.

Infant & Child Physical Activity



This module focuses on making physical activity a regular, important part of every child's day in a safe, supportive environment. Programs should provide plenty of time each day for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers to move and be active, with limits on how long children sit and strong support for tummy time for infants and movement time for toddlers and preschoolers. Indoor spaces and equipment should be designed to encourage movement, support different ages and abilities, and promote active play.

The best practices also emphasize positive teacher involvement and education. Teachers actively encourage and join children in physical activity, build movement into daily routines, and never withhold active play as punishment. Children should receive lessons that build motor skills, families offered guidance on keeping children active at home, and staff trained on physical activity and development. These practices should be guided by a written policy that ensures children have consistent opportunities to move, play, and build healthy habits.

KEY "TIME PROVIDED" BEST PRACTICE CHANGES:

- Children are not expected to sit longer than 15 minutes at a time outside of meals and naps.
- Preschool children receive at least 120 minutes of physical activity daily (half-day: 60 minutes), both indoors and outdoors, half of which should be adult-led physical activity.
- Toddlers receive at least 90 minutes of physical activity (half-day: 45 minutes), throughout the day.
- Infants are offered tummy time multiple times daily (4+ times; half-day: 2+ times).
- Infants are free to move and are not placed in seats, swings, or ExerSaucers outside of meals or naps.

KEY "INDOOR PLAY EQUIPMENT" BEST PRACTICE CHANGES:

- Indoor play spaces are divided by age group and designed to support multiple activity types while remaining fully accessible for children with special needs.
- A wide variety of safe, well-maintained, portable active play equipment is always set out during indoor free or structured play to encourage movement for toddlers/preschoolers.
- Infants are provided with developmentally appropriate equipment during tummy time and other indoor activities to promote motor development.
- Posters, books, and learning materials promote physical activity and are rotated seasonally to maintain interest and relevance.

Infant & Child Physical Activity

CONTINUED...



KEY “TEACHER PRACTICES” BEST PRACTICE CHANGES:

- Physical activity is never taken away as punishment and children are not removed from active play for more than 5 minutes as part of behavior management.
- Teachers actively supervise, encourage, and model physically active play in order to support children’s participation.
- Infants receive hands-on interaction during tummy time that supports their motor skill development.
- Physical activity is built into daily routines, transitions, and planned activities whenever possible.

KEY “EDUCATION & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT” BEST PRACTICE CHANGES:

- Preschoolers and toddlers participate in planned gross motor lessons at least once per week to build motor skills.
- Teachers talk with children informally and encouragingly about physical activity, linking movement to health, strength, and feeling good.
- Teachers and staff receive professional development on children’s physical activity at least twice per year, beyond basic playground safety.
- Families are offered education on children’s physical activity at least twice per year through meetings, handouts, or other communication tools.

KEY “POLICY” BEST PRACTICE CHANGES:

- A written physical activity policy guides practice, outlining activity time requirements and strategies for encouraging movement.

Infant & Child Physical Activity

TIME PROVIDED



Preschool children are provided 120 minutes or more for indoor and outdoor physical activity each day. (Half-day: 60 minutes or more).

- Schedule at least three outdoor play periods each day in full-day programs (two outdoor play periods per day for half-day programs).
- Incorporate movement into lessons and activities.
- Add movement breaks (dancing, stretching, action songs) between activities and include physical activity during transitions (marching, hopping, animal walks).
- Track active time on the daily schedule to ensure the total reaches 120 minutes.

Toddlers are provided 90 minutes or more for indoor and outdoor physical activity each day. (Half-day: 45 minutes or more).

- Provide both indoor and outdoor opportunities for climbing, pushing, pulling, and dancing.
- Schedule at least two outdoor play periods each day in full-day programs.
- Offer multiple short bursts of activity throughout the day during scheduled recesses, lessons, and transitions.
- Keep ride-on toys, balls, tunnels, and soft climbers accessible throughout all seasons.

Infants are offered tummy time 4 times per day or more. (Half-day: 2 times per day or more).

- Schedule tummy time after specific, frequent activities such as diaper changes or naps to build consistency.
- Use short, frequent tummy-time sessions instead of one long session.
- Get down on the floor with infants to encourage lifting heads and reaching.
- Use mirrors, soft toys, or books to engage infants during tummy time.

Adult-led physical activity is provided to preschool children for 60 minutes or more each day. (Half-day: 30 minutes or more).

- Plan teacher-led movement games and activities such as Simon Says, obstacle courses, yoga, activity songs, and more into daily lessons.
- Lead structured outdoor games such as tag, relay races, and follow-the-leader.
- Spread adult-led activities across the day instead of doing them all at once.

Outside of nap and meal times, the longest that preschool children and toddlers are expected to remain seated at any one time is less than 15 minutes.

- Avoid long periods of structured sitting by planning a movement break before 15 minutes pass, using a timer if necessary.
- Break up circle time with movement songs or stretches.
- Alternate seated activities with standing or movement-based learning.
- Use flexible seating (wobble cushions, standing tables).

Outside of nap and meal times, infants are never placed in seats, swings, or ExerSaucers.

- Keep infants on the floor for play whenever they are awake and not eating or being held for their comfort.
- Provide safe floor spaces with mats, rugs, and soft toys.
- Remove or limit use of swings, bouncers, and ExerSaucers.
- Train staff on the benefits of active floor play and how they can support infants in doing it.

Infant & Child Physical Activity

INDOOR PLAY EQUIPMENT



The indoor play space offers separate areas for different age groups that accommodate multiple types of activities and offer full access to children with special needs.

- Designate clearly defined play zones for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers.
- Use rugs, low shelves, or low dividers to separate activity areas while keeping sightlines open.
- Ensure pathways and play areas are accessible for children with special needs (wide spaces, adaptive equipment).
- Offer multiple activity options in each area (e.g. movement, building, music, quiet play).

A large variety of portable play equipment is available and in good condition for children to use indoors.

- Maintain a supply of portable equipment such as balls, tunnels, scarves, hoops, balance toys, and push toys.
- Inspect equipment regularly for safety and repair or replace damaged items.
- Store equipment in open, labeled bins so children and staff can easily access it.
- Rotate equipment according to a weekly, biweekly, or monthly schedule to maintain interest and variety.

During indoor free play time, at least a few pieces of portable play equipment are always available to preschool children and toddlers to encourage physical activity.

- Set out at least a few active play items at the start of every indoor free play period.
- Set up stations so that children can rotate between items and share more easily.
- Include equipment that encourages large-muscle movement (throwing, rolling, crawling, balancing).
- Ensure toddlers and preschoolers can choose equipment independently.

Developmentally appropriate portable play equipment is always offered to infants during tummy time and other indoor activities.

- Provide infants with soft mats, mirrors, textured toys, and lightweight grasping items.
- Place toys within reach of children during tummy time to encourage movement and exploration.
- Create a schedule to rotate infant equipment frequently to support different motor skills.

There is a large variety of posters, books, and other learning materials that promote physical activity, with items added or rotated seasonally.

- Display posters showing children moving, playing, dancing, and being active.
- Include books about sports, movement, yoga, dancing, and outdoor play.
- Rotate materials seasonally (e.g. winter indoor movement, summer outdoor play themes).
- Avoid posters or books that promote sedentary behaviors.

Infant & Child Physical Activity

TEACHER PRACTICES



Teachers never take away time for physical activity or remove preschool children or toddlers from physically active playtime for longer than 5 minutes, as a way of managing challenging behaviors.

- Establish a clear rule regarding withholding active play.
- Use alternative, positive discipline strategies for challenging behaviors, such as redirection and calm-down spaces.
- If a child needs a break for safety reasons, allow them to rejoin active play as soon as possible.
- Train all staff and substitutes on this expectation during onboarding and throughout the year.

During preschool children's physically active playtime, teachers supervise, verbally encourage, and regularly join in to increase children's physical activity.

- Position teachers throughout the play space to supervise and engage.
- Rotate staff roles so supervision never becomes passive or stationary.
- Verbally encourage movement (e.g. "I see you running fast!" "Can you jump higher?").
- Join children in games, dancing, and movement to model enthusiasm and guide learning.

During tummy time and other activities, teachers always interact with infants to help them build motor skills.

- Get down on the floor with infants during tummy time.
- Talk, sing, and make eye contact to encourage lifting heads, reaching, and rolling.
- Place toys just out of reach to support motor skill development.
- Facilitate other types of physical activity (e.g. supervised use of yoga balls for bouncing and laying on stomach).
- Adjust activities based on each infant's ability and comfort.

Teachers incorporate physical activity into classroom routines, transitions, and planned activities each time they see an opportunity.

- Use movement during transitions (e.g. marching, hopping, animal walks).
- Add short movement breaks during group times.
- Incorporate action songs, yoga, and stretching into daily routines.
- Look for opportunities to turn learning activities into movement (e.g. counting jumps, acting out stories).

Infant & Child Physical Activity

EDUCATION & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



Preschool children and toddlers participate in planned lessons focused on building gross motor skills 1 time per week or more.

- Schedule at least one planned gross motor lesson each week for toddlers and preschoolers.
- Use simple lesson plans focused on skills like running, jumping, throwing, balancing, climbing, or kicking.
- Incorporate obstacle courses, movement stations, or guided games.
- Adapt activities so all children, including those with special needs, can participate.

Teachers talk with children informally about the importance of physical activity each time they see an opportunity.

- Use everyday moments to talk about movement (e.g. “Jumping helps our legs get strong!”).
- Comment positively when children are active (e.g. “Your heart is working hard when you run!”)
- Connect physical activity to positive feelings children may have (e.g. strong, energized, calm).
- Reinforce that moving our bodies is fun and healthy.

Teachers and staff receive professional development on children’s physical activity (other than playground safety) 2 times per year or more.

- Schedule two or more annual staff trainings focused on physical activity.
- Include physical activity topics in staff meetings, in-service days, or online trainings.
- Track participation to ensure all teaching staff receive required training.

Professional development on children’s physical activity covers a variety of topics including motor skill development and guidance to help ensure that children get the recommended amount of daily physical activity in child care and at home.

- Training topics on physical activity should go beyond playground safety.
- Ensure trainings include gross motor skill development, age-appropriate physical activities, strategies to meet daily activity time recommendations, ways teachers can encourage movement throughout the day indoor and out, and accommodating special needs.
- Use a mix of videos, demonstrations, and hands-on practice.

Families are offered education on children’s physical activity 2 times per year or more.

- Offer family education through newsletters or emails, parent meetings or workshops, and handouts or resource boards.
- Share information at least twice per year, as children grow and develop or meet certain milestones, in line with lessons given in class, and upon request.

Education for families on children’s physical activity covers a variety of topics including motor skill development and guidance to help families encourage physical activity at home.

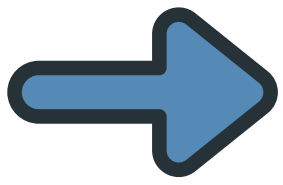
- Provide guidance on topics such as gross motor development by age; easy, low-cost activities families can do at home; limiting screen time and encouraging active play; and ideas that work in small spaces and different seasons.
- Use family-friendly language and culturally appropriate materials.
- Share free or low-cost physical activity opportunities available in the broader community.

Infant & Child Physical Activity Policy

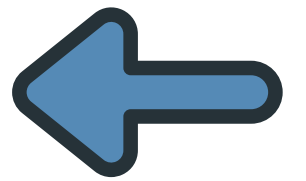


There is a written policy on physical activity that includes a variety of topics related to the amount of time provided to children for physical activity and ways that children are encouraged to be physically active.

- Develop a written policy that includes required amounts and reporting expectations of children's daily physical activity; guidance on not withholding physical activity as part of behavior management; and how staff can support infants', toddlers', and preschoolers' physical activity.
- Share the policy with staff and families.
- Review and update the policy annually.



For more free ideas, tools, and materials, check out the corresponding sections of the Healthier Child Care Environments Toolkit.



Outdoor Play & Physical Activity



This module focuses on giving children frequent, active, and engaging outdoor play experiences every day in a safe and well-designed environment. A written policy should help ensure children consistently benefit from meaningful outdoor play and learning opportunities. Programs should provide plenty of outdoor time for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers, along with a variety of outdoor activities such as free play, structured learning, gardening, and movement games. Quality outdoor spaces include shade, open areas to run, gardens, paths for wheeled toys, and a wide range of portable equipment so all children can be active at the same time. Teachers and staff should receive training on outdoor play and learning, and families should be offered education on the importance of outdoor activity.

KEY “OUTDOOR PLAYTIME” BEST PRACTICE CHANGES:

- Preschool children and toddlers go outside at least 3 times per day (half-day programs: 2 times per day).
Infants are taken outdoors at least 2 times per day (half-day: 1 time per day).
- Preschool children receive at least 90 minutes of outdoor play daily (half-day: 45 minutes).
Toddlers receive at least 60 minutes of outdoor play daily (half-day: 30 minutes).

KEY “OUTDOOR PLAY EQUIPMENT” BEST PRACTICE CHANGES:

- Children engage in a wide variety of outdoor activities, including free play, structured learning, seasonal activities, and outdoor field trips.
- Outdoor spaces provide enough shade for all children at the same time, using trees, structures, or portable shade.
- Preschool outdoor play spaces include 8 or more distinct play areas that support different types of play/learning, including a garden for children to actively participate in caring for/harvesting from as well as a large area in which all children can run and safely play together.
- Outdoor play areas include abundant, well-maintained portable equipment, with at least one item per child always available during active play, including wheeled-toy paths and diverse equipment types.

Outdoor Play & Physical Activity

CONTINUED...



KEY “EDUCATION & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT” BEST PRACTICE CHANGES:

- Staff receive outdoor play and learning training at least twice per year.
- Professional development includes recommended outdoor time, strategies for encouraging outdoor physical activity, and communicating its benefits to families.
- Families receive outdoor play education at least twice per year, with guidance on daily outdoor time and how to support activity at home.
- Family education includes the program’s outdoor play and learning policy and age-appropriate outdoor play recommendations.

KEY “POLICY” BEST PRACTICE CHANGES:

- The program has a written outdoor play and learning policy that outlines required outdoor time and strategies to help children fully benefit from outdoor experiences.

Outdoor Play & Physical Activity

OUTDOOR PLAY TIME



Outdoor playtime is provided to preschool children and toddlers 3 times per day or more. (Half-day: 2 times per day or more).

- Schedule multiple outdoor play periods (such as in three 30-minute blocks) instead of one long block.
- Use outdoor time before and after meals or naps.
- Go outside whenever weather permits, not only on “nice” days.
- Track outdoor time on classroom schedules to ensure frequency goals are met.

Outdoor playtime is provided to preschool children for 90 minutes or more each day. (Half-day: 45 minutes or more).

- Combine free play and teacher-led activities outdoors.
- Plan active outdoor learning experiences (e.g. nature walks, obstacle courses).
- Make outdoor play a protected, non-negotiable part of the daily schedule.
- Avoid cutting outdoor time short for transitions or minor delays.

Outdoor playtime is provided to toddlers for 60 minutes or more each day. (Half-day: 30 minutes or more).

- Offer outdoor play in short, frequent sessions or as suited to toddlers’ attention spans.
- Allow toddlers freedom to move and explore safely.
- Ensure outdoor spaces are toddler-friendly and developmentally appropriate with equipment for climbing, pushing, and exploring.

Infants are taken outdoors 2 times per day or more. (Half-day: 1 time per day or more).

- Take infants outdoors for stroller walks, blanket play, or tummy time.
- Schedule outdoor time after naps or feedings.
- Use shaded areas, mats, and weather-appropriate clothing.
- Treat outdoor time as part of infants’ daily routine, not an optional activity.

Outdoor Play & Physical Activity

OUTDOOR PLAY EQUIPMENT



The program does different types of activities with children outdoors, including free play, structured learning opportunities, seasonal outdoor activities, walking trips, and/or outdoor field trips.

- Schedule both free play and teacher-led activities outdoors each day.
- Rotate and vary weekly outdoor plans.
- Incorporate seasonal activities (e.g. snow play, leaf collecting, water play, gardening).
- Use neighborhood walks or short outdoor excursions as learning opportunities.
- Plan outdoor field trips to parks, farms, and/or nature centers.

In the outdoor play space, structures or trees provide enough shade to accommodate all children at the same time.

- Use a mix of natural shade (trees, shrubs) and built shade (canopies, shade sails, pergolas).
- Place shade structures near high-use areas (sand, dramatic play, eating areas).
- Move portable shade structures as needed during the day.
- Ensure shaded areas are accessible to children with mobility needs.

The program's open area for outdoor games, activities, and events is large enough for all children, who regularly use the space together, to run around safely.

- Designate a clear, open running area free of fixed equipment.
- Stagger use of smaller areas so large groups can safely share space.
- Clearly mark boundaries for running games.
- Regularly inspect surfaces to remove tripping hazards.

The outdoor play space for preschool children includes 8 play areas or more.

- Create clearly defined areas such as a climbing and gross motor zone, open running area, sand or water play area, dramatic or imaginative play area, nature exploration area, quiet/rest area, wheeled toy path, and garden or sensory area
- Use fencing, landscaping, or equipment placement to define zones.

There is a garden that produces enough fruits and/or vegetables to provide children meals or snacks during 1 or more seasons.

- Start small with raised beds, containers, or garden plots.
- Grow easy, child-friendly crops (lettuce, tomatoes, herbs, beans).
- Involve children in planting, watering, harvesting, and tasting.
- Plan snack or meal menus to align with harvest times.
- Partner with families or community groups to help maintain the garden, particularly during extended program closures.

There is a paved path for wheeled toys that is 5 feet wide or wider, has curves and loops, and connects the building with different play areas.

- Design paths that loop and connect play areas to prevent congestion.
- Ensure paths are smooth, wide, and accessible for all children.
- Use signage or painted markings to guide traffic flow.
- Provide helmets as necessary and clear safety rules for wheeled play.

Outdoor Play & Physical Activity

OUTDOOR PLAY EQUIPMENT CONTINUED...



Most or all of the following portable play equipment is available and in good condition for children to use outdoors: jumping toys, push-pull toys, ride-on toys, twirling toys, throwing, catching, and striking toys, balance toys, crawling or tumbling equipment, and other “loose parts.”

- Ensure regular access to items that help children develop a variety of gross motor skills and allow children to use items in creative ways.
- Inspect equipment routinely and repair or replace damaged items.

A large variety of portable play equipment is available and in good condition for children to use outdoors.

- Ensure play equipment allows for a variety of structured and free-play activities and can be adapted for various uses to accommodate different interests and abilities.
- Rotate equipment regularly while keeping a baseline selection available.
- Do not limit equipment use to “special days.”

Portable play equipment is always available to children during outdoor active playtime.

- Set out equipment before children go outside, not after.
- Store equipment in outdoor bins or sheds for quick access.
- Provide seasonal play equipment as well as year-round play equipment.

There is always at least one item of portable play equipment available for each child during outdoor active playtime.

- Count children and set out equal or greater numbers of equipment items.
- Offer duplicates of popular items to reduce waiting and conflict.
- Mix equipment types so children can choose based on interest and ability.
- Observe play and add equipment if children are waiting or disengaged.

Outdoor Play & Physical Activity

EDUCATION & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



Teachers and staff receive professional development on outdoor play and learning 2 times per year or more.

- Schedule two or more annual trainings focused specifically on outdoor play and learning.
- Include outdoor play topics during in-service days, staff meetings, and online or self-paced professional learning.
- Track training completion to ensure all teaching staff participate.
- Post a quick-reference chart in staff areas outlining required outdoor time by age group.

Professional development on outdoor play and learning covers a variety of topics to help ensure that children get the recommended amount of outdoor playtime each day.

- Topics should cover developmental milestones, gross motor skills and how to support them, integrating outdoor play into everyday learning, safety protocol, weather policies, and special need accommodations.
- Clearly review daily outdoor playtime recommendations for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers.
- Use examples of half-day vs. full-day schedules to clarify expectations.

Professional development on outdoor play and learning covers the recommended amount of outdoor play time for children, ways to encourage children's physical activity outdoors and ways to promote outdoor play and learning to families.

- Train staff to actively supervise and join children during outdoor play, use verbal encouragement, offer both free play and teacher-led outdoor activities, and adapt outdoor play during different weather conditions.
- Train staff to talk with families about the benefits of outdoor play and learning, how much outdoor time children need daily, and ideas of achieving more outdoor time at home.

Families are offered education on outdoor play and learning 2 times per year or more.

- Plan educational presentations, workshops, or other outreach at two set times per year (e.g., fall and spring).
- Offer a variety of topics that cover basic outdoor physical activity recommendations and additional accommodations.
- Reinforce messages during enrollment and seasonal transitions.

Education for families on outdoor play and learning includes a variety of topics to help ensure that children get the recommended amount of outdoor playtime each day.

- Provide staff with family-friendly talking points they can use during pick-up, drop-off, or conferences, and through family resource bulletins and digital communication methods.
- Share information that helps families meet their and their children's specific needs, whether those be economic, physical, social, religious, etc.

Education for families on outdoor play and learning includes the recommended amount of outdoor play time for children, ways to encourage children's physical activity outdoors, and the program's policy on outdoor play and learning.

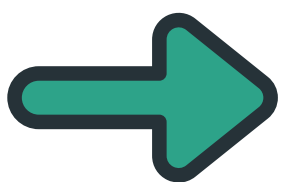
- Provide families with information that is appropriate to their child's ability level regarding recommended daily outdoor playtime, ways to encourage physical activity outdoors at home, and appropriate clothing for outdoor play in all seasons.
- Share the program's outdoor play and learning policy.
- Use clear, positive language and offer materials in multiple formats and/or languages.

Outdoor Play & Physical Activity POLICY

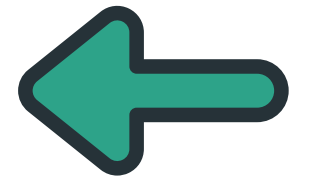


The program has a written policy on outdoor play and learning that includes a variety of topics related to the amount of outdoor playtime provided and ways to ensure that children can take full advantage of this time.

- Develop a written policy that includes required amounts of daily outdoor playtime by age group; how outdoor play supports learning and development; weather guidelines and appropriate clothing; and strategies to ensure all children can participate.
- Share the policy with staff and families through handbooks and orientation.
- Review and update the policy annually.



For more free ideas, tools, and materials, check out the corresponding sections of the [Healthier Child Care Environments Toolkit](#).



Screen Time



This module focuses on limiting and carefully managing young children’s screen time to support healthy development. Screens should not be easily accessible, should be used very sparingly with children 2-years-old and older, and should not be allowed at all for children under age two. When screens are used, the content should always be educational, commercial-free, and paired with teacher guidance and discussion, while teachers should also always offer attractive activities as alternatives to screen time. Screen time should never be used as a reward. Teachers and families should receive regular training and education on appropriate screen use, and a program should follow a clear written policy so expectations about screen time are consistent, intentional, and clearly communicated.

KEY “AVAILABILITY” BEST PRACTICE CHANGES:

- Televisions are not present in classrooms. They are stored out of children’s reach and not regularly available.
- Children ages 2 and older have limited screen time (full-day: 0-30 minutes per week; half-day: 0-15 minutes), while children under age 2 are not allowed any screen time.
- Only educational, commercial-free programming is used when screens are offered.
- Children are always given an alternative activity when screen time is available.

KEY “TEACHER PRACTICES” BEST PRACTICE CHANGES:

- Screen time is rarely or never used as a reward or behavior management tool.
- Teachers actively engage with children during screen time, talking about what they are seeing and learning.

KEY “EDUCATION & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT” BEST PRACTICE CHANGES:

- Staff receive screen-time training at least twice per year, covering recommended amounts and appropriate use in child care.
- Families receive screen-time education at least twice per year, aligned with program practices, that includes practical guidance on screen-time limits and healthy strategies families can use at home.

KEY “POLICY” BEST PRACTICE CHANGES:

- A written screen time policy is in place that outlines age-appropriate limits, types of allowed usage, and how guidelines are shared with staff and families.

Screen Time

AVAILABILITY



There are no televisions or televisions are stored outside of classrooms and are not regularly available to children.

- Remove TVs entirely or store them outside of classrooms.
- Keep screens out of daily sight so they are not a default activity.
- Do not use screens as background noise or for transitions.
- Monitor classrooms to ensure screens are not regularly available.

Children 2 years of age and older are allowed 30 minutes of screen time or less each week. (Half-day: Less than 15 minutes or no screen time is allowed).

- Track screen use to ensure children receive 30 minutes or less per week (half-day programs: less than 15 minutes or none).
- Schedule screen time only for specific, planned purposes, not daily use.
- Use a weekly log so staff can easily monitor total screen minutes.

For children under 2 years of age, no screen time is allowed.

- Clearly state “no screen time” for infants and young toddlers in policy and training.
- Offer developmentally appropriate alternatives such as floor play, books, music, and movement.
- Do not provide staff with devices for classroom use.
- Ensure substitutes and float staff are aware of the no-screen expectation.

When television or videos are shown to children, this programming is always educational and commercial free.

- Pre-approve videos or programs before showing them.
- Avoid content with ads, fast-paced visuals, or commercial branding. Download or purchase content to view ad-free when available.
- Connect screen content to learning goals when used.
- Never use screens during meals or snacks.

When screen time is offered, children are always given the opportunity to do an alternative activity.

- Provide children with the choice to opt out of screen time.
- Set up engaging alternatives such as art, blocks, books, and dramatic play.
- Ensure alternatives are equally (or more) appealing and well supervised to help them go smoothly.
- Communicate to children that choosing not to watch is always okay.

Screen Time

TEACHER PRACTICES



Screen time is rarely or never used as a reward.

- Establish a clear classroom rule: screens are not used for behavior management or rewards.
- Train staff to use non-screen alternatives (e.g. stickers, extra outdoor time, choice activities).
- Communicate this expectation during staff onboarding and substitute orientation.
- Reinforce the policy during classroom observations and feedback.

When screen time is offered, teachers always talk with children about what they are seeing and learning.

- Require teachers to stay with children and engage with them when screens are used.
- Use open-ended questions to engage with children (e.g. “What do you notice?” “What is happening here?”).
- Connect screen content to classroom learning or children’s experiences.
- Pause videos periodically to discuss ideas or vocabulary.

EDUCATION & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



Teachers and staff receive professional development on screen time 2 times per year or more.

- Schedule two or more trainings annually focused on screen time.
- Include screen time topics in staff meetings, in-service days, or online modules.
- Track participation to ensure all teaching staff receive the required training.

Professional development on screen time includes a variety of topics related to the recommended amount, types, and use of screen time in child care.

- Ensure training includes effects of excessive screen time on children, recommended screen time limits by age, appropriate types of screen use in child care, and active vs. passive screen use.
- Provide practical examples and classroom scenarios.
- Update training content as guidelines change.

Families are offered education on screen time 2 times per year or more.

- Share screen-time information through parent newsletters or emails, family meetings or workshops, and enrollment materials or bulletin boards
- Plan education at two set times per year (e.g. fall and spring).
- Reinforce messages during conferences or informal conversations.

Education for families on screen time includes a variety of topics related to screen time recommendations and how families can follow them at home.

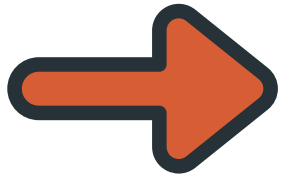
- Provide guidance from trusted sources on age-appropriate screen limits; choosing educational, commercial-free content; balancing screen time with active play and sleep; and creating screen-free routines at home.
- Use clear, family-friendly language and practical examples.
- Share the program’s screen time policy so families understand expectations.

Screen Time POLICY



There is a written policy on screen time that includes a variety of topics related to the program's screen time practices and communicating screen time recommendations to teachers, staff, and families.

- Create a written policy that includes age-specific screen time limits, types of allowed programming, expectations for staff use of screens, and how screen time guidelines are shared with families.
- Include the policy in staff handbooks and family materials.
- Review the policy annually and during staff orientation.



For more free ideas, tools, and materials, check out the corresponding sections of the [Healthier Child Care Environments Toolkit](#).

