

SOUTH AFRICAN 24-HOUR MOVEMENT GUIDELINES FOR BIRTH TO FIVE YEARS



An integration of physical activity, sitting behaviour, screen time and sleep

Why are 24-hour movement guidelines important for children from birth to 5 years?

These are the first guidelines targeting physical activity, sitting behaviour, screen time and sleep in South African children. They have been developed in response to the research that shows how these movement behaviours are linked to healthy growth and physical development, as well as cognitive, social and emotional development in children from birth to 5 years.

These guidelines recommend that children from birth to 5 years should participate in a range of play-based and structured physical activities that are appropriate for their age and ability, and that are fun and safe. Children should be encouraged to do these activities independently as well as with adults and other children. Caregivers should engage in activities that are loving, and involve play and talking with children.

These guidelines also emphasise that the quality of what is done when sitting matters. For children younger than 2 years, screen time is NOT recommended. For children aged 2-5 years, sitting activities that are screen-based should be limited. The quality of sleep in children from birth to 5 years is also important, and screen time should be avoided before bed. Family members should be encouraged to avoid using screens in shared sleeping areas, especially while children are falling asleep.

Children from birth to 5 years who receive support to meet these movement guidelines are likely to grow up healthier, fitter and stronger. They may also have greater motor skill abilities, be more prepared for school, manage their feelings better, and enjoy life more. The benefits of following these guidelines are greater than the potential harms.

Who are these guidelines for?

These guidelines are for those who have an interest in the health and development of all children from birth to 5 years, including parents and family, educators, caregivers, health professionals, and community workers. These guidelines should be implemented in homes, early childhood development programmes and centres, or any setting where children may engage in these movement behaviours. They apply to all apparently healthy children from birth to 5 years; children of all abilities, cultural ethnicities, language backgrounds, income settings, and living in all parts of South Africa. For children with a medical condition, it would be best to first consult with a health care professional about how these guidelines should be adapted to suit their specific needs and abilities.



How do these guidelines link to existing policy documents in South Africa?

Road to Health book: Following these guidelines can help children achieve the developmental milestones outlined in the Road to Health book. Both documents recognise the importance of love, play and talking to stimulate children's development and learning from birth.

Paediatric Food-based Dietary Guidelines: Both guidelines promote health, growth and development of children.

National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy 2015: The principles in these guidelines can improve the quality of early childhood development programmes. Both documents recognise the importance of play for development and learning, and the role of parents in children's early development.

National Curriculum Framework for Children from Birth to Four: These guidelines support the themes of learning and development, strong connections with adults, and the child being a competent person. Following these guidelines contributes to building a strong foundation for lifelong learning in the child.

These guidelines are based on the best available research, expert consensus, stakeholder consultation, and consideration of what is regarded to be important, applicable, feasible and equitable across all South African settings. Furthermore, they are consistent with World Health Organization guidelines.

Further details on how to achieve these guidelines are available at www.laureus.co.za.

A HEALTHY 24-HOUR DAY INCLUDES:



BABIES (BIRTH TO 1 YEAR OLD)

Moving

Being physically active several times a day in a variety of ways through interactive floor-based play, including crawling. For babies not yet mobile, this includes at least 30 minutes of tummy time spread throughout the day while awake, and other movements such as reaching and grasping.

Sitting

Engaging in stimulating activities with a caregiver, such as playing with safe objects and toys, having baby conversations, singing, and storytelling. Babies should NOT be strapped in and unable to move for more than 1 hour at a time (e.g., in a pram, high chair, or on a caregiver's back or chest) while awake. Screen time is NOT recommended.

Sleeping

14 to 17 hours (for babies aged 0-3 months) and 12 to 16 hours (for babies aged 4-11 months) of good quality sleep, including naps in the day. Sleeping may occur while a baby is strapped to a caregiver, or while a baby is being held.

Screens include televisions, cell phones, tablets, video games, and computers.



TODDLERS (1 AND 2 YEARS OLD)

Moving

At least 180 minutes spent in a variety of physical activities including energetic play, spread throughout the day; more is better.

Sitting

Engaging in activities that promote development such as reading, singing, games with blocks, puzzles, and storytelling with a caregiver. Toddlers should NOT be strapped in and unable to move for more than 1 hour at a time (e.g., in a pram, high chair or strapped on a caregiver's back or chest), and should not sit for extended periods. For toddlers younger than 2 years, screen time is NOT recommended. For toddlers aged 2 years, screen time should be no more than 1 hour; less is better.

Sleeping

11 to 14 hours of good quality sleep, including naps in the day, with consistent sleep and wake-up times.



PRE-SCHOOLERS (3, 4 AND 5 YEARS OLD)

Moving

At least 180 minutes spent in a variety of physical activities, of which at least 60 minutes is energetic play that raises their heart rate and makes them 'huff and puff' (e.g. running, jumping, dancing), spread throughout the day; more is better.

Sitting

Engaging in activities such as reading, singing, puzzles, arts and crafts, and storytelling with a caregiver and other children. Pre-schoolers should NOT be strapped in and unable to move for more than 1 hour at a time and should not sit for extended periods. Screen time should be no more than 1 hour per day; less is better.

Sleeping

10 to 13 hours of good quality sleep, which may include a nap, with consistent sleep and wake-up times.

Helping children from birth to 5 years to stick to these guidelines may be challenging at times! For children who are not meeting these guidelines, it is recommended that small changes are made to help them start working towards what is stated in these guidelines.

To further support children from birth to 5 years in their movement behaviours over a 24-hour day, encourage them to do more energetic play, choose age-appropriate, interactive sitting activities instead of sitting or lying in front of a screen, and to get enough sleep. This will help them enjoy greater benefits to their health and development.

"Our children are the rock on which our future will be built, our greatest asset as a nation." Nelson Mandela



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