

# Today's children do engage in active play

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New research suggests that promoting active play in children's leisure time could increase the physical activity of today's children, but that such strategies might need to be tailored according to gender.

The paper, 'What is the meaning and nature of active play for today's children in the UK?' by Rowan Brockman and colleagues in the Centre for Exercise, Nutrition and Health Sciences within the School for Policy Studies at the University of Bristol, is published in the *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and [Physical Activity](#)*.

The researchers found children's perceptions of what constituted play were broad and included both physically active and sedentary behaviours. Children aged 10- to 11-years old reported that they frequently engaged in active play consistent with that of previous generations, and valued both the physical and social benefits it provided.

However, whereas boys prefer 'having a kick about' or riding bikes, girls are less likely to have an equivalent specific physical activity. Additionally, boys appear to have greater freedom to roam in their active play than girls. Finally, boys are more likely to play with neighbourhood friends but girls are more often restricted to playing with family members.

Rowan Brockman, a researcher in the Centre for Exercise, Nutrition and Health Sciences, said: "Contemporary children do engage in active play and value both the physical and social benefits it provides. This suggests that some children, at least, do not prefer to spend all their time watching

TV or on computer.

"However, further research is needed to build a more informed picture of children's play before we consider strategies to increase it."

Eleven focus groups were conducted with 77, 10- to 11-year-old children from four primary schools in Bristol. Focus groups examined: 1) children's perceptions of 'play'; 2) how much of their play is active play; and 3) contexts of children's active play.

Preventing the decline in physical activity, which occurs around 10- to 11-years of age, is a public health priority. Physically active play can make unique contributions to children's development that cannot be obtained from more structured forms of physical activity.

The study is part of a larger project, the Active Play Project (TAPP), which examines the contribution of active play to the overall physical activity of primary school [children](#).

Provided by University of Bristol

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