



HEALTHY HOME HEALTHY FAMILY

# Active Play in Families with Elementary School Children: Parent Beliefs and Behaviors

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## Abstract

**Objective:** Active family play offers physical and emotional benefits, yet little is known about parental beliefs and behaviors related to active play. This study aimed to assess perceived importance, barriers to, and facilitators of active play in parents of 6-to-11 year-olds.

**Methods:** Trained moderators led scripted focus group discussions related to active play with 37 parents in 3 states (FL, NJ, WV) and a brief survey was completed by 185 parents.

**Results:** Survey results revealed that parents were actively playing with children an average of 2.92±1.97SD days/week. Focus group interchanges revealed that parents find active play important to good health in families and encourage children to play with other children to form relationships. However, parents face barriers that influence the amount of active play their children receive. Commonly named barriers included time scarcity and dense schedules for both parents and children, with parents having to coordinate work schedules with children's school and extra-curricular activities. A common barrier to parent-child co-play was parents' lack of energy. Parents felt that as their kids got older it was more difficult for them to keep up with kids and therefore felt kids should play with other kids instead of parents. Bad weather also was a barrier to outdoor active play for many families. When faced with active play indoors, parents often struggled with finding space in the home for play. Parents named dancing as a common active indoor activity that requires little space. Further, children in elementary school were less active compared to younger years, increasing the need for parental effort to motivate children to play. To overcome barriers, parents set small, reasonable goals to stay active. Utilization of available resources was encouraged by parents, with English-speaking parents recommending extra-curricular activities as an avenue for active play and Spanish-speaking parents encouraging recreational activities such as the park.

**Conclusions:** Parent and children's active play time falls short of the recommended 60 minutes of active play daily, despite parents' acknowledgement of the importance of active play. Obesity prevention programs could help parents learn effective strategies for promoting active play.

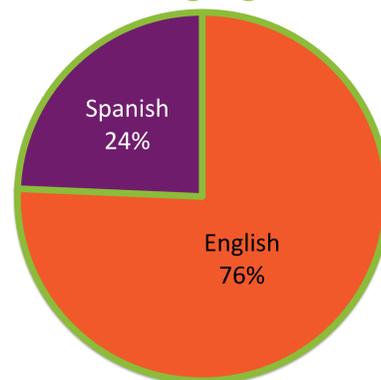
## Funding source

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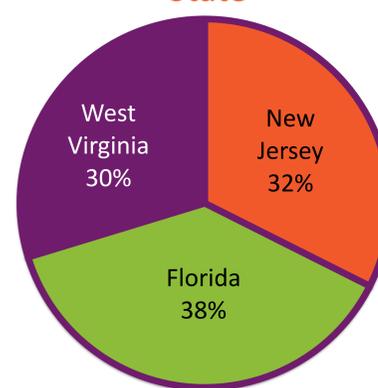
## Methods

- **Sample:**
  - Parents of 6-11 year old children
  - 24% Spanish-speaking, 76% English-speaking
  - Education: 19% high school or less, 27% some college, 54% bachelor's degree or higher
  - Residents of West Virginia, New Jersey, or Florida
- **Data Collection:** Brief survey and focus groups conducted by trained moderator
- **Data Analysis:**
  - **Qualitative:** Constant comparison and identification of themes
  - **Quantitative:** Means and frequencies analyzed from survey data

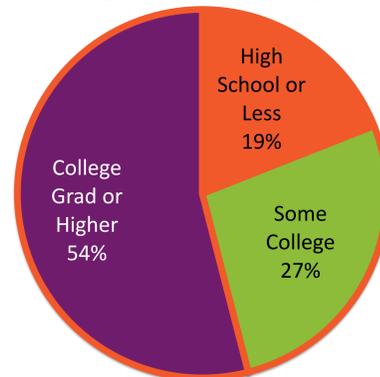
Language



State



Education Level



"It is okay to be silly and act like a child when you play with them."

"They really enjoy skating, so I learned to skate so that I could do it with them even though I was afraid."

"Space is a barrier inside the home, especially when your kids are bigger. There's no room to run around."

"When I do play with my son, it gives him an understanding that I am interested in what he is interested in and makes him be aware that I am here."

"We all have fitbits and it's a competition. My kids want to be active. We compare how many steps we get."

## Barriers & Facilitators

### Barriers

- Time scarcity and dense schedules (work and extra-curricular)
- Parents' lack of energy to play with their children
- Parents felt kids should play with other kids instead of parents
- Bad weather prevented outdoor active play
- Limited space in the home available for active play indoors
- Elementary school children were less active than when younger

### Facilitators

- Finding indoor physical activity that requires little space, such as dancing
- Setting small, reasonable goals to stay active
- Using extra-curricular activities as an avenue for active play
- Encouraging use of recreational facilities, such as parks

## Conclusions

- Parents recognize the importance of active play but struggle to ensure children get adequate activity.
- Future research studies should aim to help parents overcome barriers to active play time.

## Results

- Parents played actively with children an average of 2.92±1.97SD days/week
- Parents believe active play is important to good health
- Parents encouraged children to play with other kids to form relationships