

Move, Play, Grow:



Active Play for Orkney Families



Active play isn't just fun – it's a key part of helping children grow up healthy, confident, and happy. Whether it's climbing, chasing, jumping, or exploring, this booklet is packed with easy ideas, step-by-step guides, and local park listings to turn everyday moments into playful adventures.

Designed for local parents and carers, it's your go to guide for getting kids moving, laughing, and learning - right in Orkney.

What is active play?

Active play is any kind of physical activity that gets children moving. It can be:

- ✿ Structured - like games or sports
- ✿ Spontaneous - like running around, climbing, dancing or exploring outdoors

It's all about fun, movement, and using energy in ways that help children grow strong, confident, and healthy.

Why it matters

All kinds of play help children grow, but active play is especially powerful. It doesn't have to mean sports or workouts - just everyday movement like walking to nursery, playing in the park, or helping with simple chores.



Young children are naturally energetic, and giving them safe spaces to move, explore, and be curious is what matters most.

Joining in with their play, whether it's dancing or rolling around on the floor, can be fun and positive for everyone's wellbeing. Active play boosts mood, builds confidence, and helps the whole family feel better, together.

Benefits of being active

Benefits for everyone

Being active can help with:

- Strengthening bones, muscles, posture and flexibility
- Improving balance and coordination
- Boosting energy, mental alertness, and mood
- Managing stress and supporting better sleep and immunity
- Supporting a healthy weight and appetite
- Building confidence, new skills and sense of achievement
- Encouraging social connection and stronger family relationships
- Offering children positive role model for movement
- Reduced risk of falls and injuries later in life
- Supporting heart health and reducing some illnesses (like stroke, diabetes, and certain cancers)

Extra benefits for children:

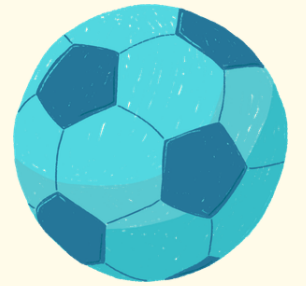
- Helping their brain and body develop
- Encouraging healthy habits for life
- Supporting behaviour and emotional regulation
- Building confidence and self-esteem
- Teaching sharing and turn-taking

Extra benefits for adults:

- Supporting lower blood pressure and heart health
- Strengthening pelvic floor muscles
- Maintaining mobility and reducing risk of falls
- Reducing the effects of stress
- Supporting overall wellbeing and energy levels



Active play ideas



The more activity ideas we have that babies and young children enjoy, the easier it is to keep them moving, learning, and having fun. Here are some tried-and-tested family favourites.

Babies	Toddlers	Pre-schoolers
• Tummy time • Rolling and crawling • Splashing in the bath • Water play and paddling • Baby yoga and massage • Bouncing and swaying • Action songs • Soft ball play • Baby gym • Soft play • Swimming	• Running around • Dancing to music • Throwing and rolling balls • Water play or paddling • Playing in sand or at the beach • Soft play • Ball pit • Digging or messy play • Action songs • Walks and exploring • Trampoline bouncing • Swimming	• Catch, kick and throw balls • Dance and move to music • Ride bikes or scooters • Water play or paddling • Skip and jump • Play in sand or at the beach • Soft play • Action songs • Go for walks • Bounce on trampolines • Help with gardening • Swimming

There are more examples on the next few pages!

Let's play with a ball!



What you'll need: a soft ball, bought or home made (fold 3-4 socks into a ball) and a phone or kitchen timer

Where to find it: from a £1 shop, toyshop or supermarket

Up to 12 months

Kick the ball

Lay your baby on their back, place a ball near their feet, and gently encourage them to kick it.

Roll the ball

With you and your baby lying on your tummies facing each other, roll the ball and encourage the baby to push it back to you. As they get better at this, move further away.

Reach the ball

Place a ball just out of reach during tummy time and cheer them on as they stretch to grab it.

12 months - 2 years

Kick the ball

When your toddler can walk, encourage them to walk up and kick the ball.

Catch the ball

Show them how to catch by holding their arms out. Make this easier at first by sitting or standing close to each other.

Water ball

When outside, dip the ball in water, then bounce or roll it to see what splashy patterns it makes.

2 - 5 years

Dribble the ball

Set up a simple obstacle course and encourage your child to dribble the ball around it.

Basket-ball

Throw balls into a bin or a basket. Move further away as they learn to throw more accurately.

Up in the air

Use a timer to see how long they can keep a ball in play without it falling to the ground.

Let's play with a cardboard box!

What you'll need: cardboard boxes, scissors, sticky tape, coloured crayons or washable felt tip pens.

Where to find it: supermarkets, DIY stores, local shops; ask for used cardboard boxes for free

Up to 12 months

Kicking post

Place a box close enough for your baby to reach with their feet. Show them how fun it is to kick it and make noise.

Post box

Cut a slot in a box and show your baby how to drop toys inside. Use a mix of soft and hard toys so they can enjoy the different sounds.

Put the items just out of reach to encourage stretching. Once your baby is on the move, spread them around the room to inspire crawling.

12 months - 2 years

Post box

Cut a slot into the side of a box. Invite your child to find items, like pegs, different-sized bricks, or toys, and post them through the opening.

Using a mix of shapes, textures, and sounds makes it more fun.

Box car

Draw and colour a vehicle on a cardboard box. Show your child how to hold a crayon or felt tip so they can help decorate it.

Encourage them to push, park, and drive around, as part of their imaginative play.

2 - 5 years

Monsters

Cut out eye and mouth shapes in a cardboard box, then decorate it with crayons or markers to turn it into a robot, dragon, monster, or any character your child imagines. Children naturally enjoy acting out the roles they create.

Monsters

Turn a large cardboard box into a car, train, or spaceship and decorate together. Children can take turns pushing each other around, or if your child is playing solo, you can join in and push them yourself.

Let's play with a sheet!



What you'll need: an old sheet, soft balls

Where to find it: from your cupboard or a charity shop

Up to 12 months

Peek-a-boo!

Hide behind a sheet and then pop out to surprise your baby! Even from a young age, babies enjoy this playful interaction.

Hide and seek

Hide toys under a sheet and show your baby what you've hidden and where. They'll love watching you reveal the surprise!

Before long, they'll start searching for the toys themselves. This simple game helps build memory, curiosity, and problem-solving skills.

12 months - 2 years

These activities work best with a family or group of friends.

Popcorn

Hold a sheet stretched out between you and your child. Place a ball in the middle and bounce it to see how high it goes! Try catching it again as it lands. Add more balls or invite others to join for extra fun and excitement.

Row your boat

Everyone holds the edge of a sheet and gently rocks it back and forth while singing the 'Row your boat' song together. When you reach the crocodile verse, children can dive underneath the sheet and let out a playful scream!

2 - 5 years

Rolling the ball

Sit or stand around a sheet, holding it off the ground and stretched tight.

Place a ball in the centre and work together to roll it around the edge without letting it fall off. Add a second ball to make it more challenging

The sea

With two or more people holding the edges of a sheet, a child can sit in the middle while the others gently ripple it to create waves - just like being at sea!

If your child is playing solo, a parent or carer can help by holding the sheet and making the waves

Let's go to the park!

What you'll need: blanket, outdoor toys e.g., ball, push-along toys, scooter, wellies and waterproofs or wet days, and playground equipment.

Where to find it: at home, in the park or playground

Up to 12 months

12 months - 2 years

2 - 5 years

Swing time

A gentle turn in the baby swing can encourage your little one to kick their legs. It's a simple way to help build strength and coordination while they enjoy the movement.

Walk to the park

Encourage your child to walk all or part of the way to the park. Chat together about what you see along the way - cars, animals, colours, or shapes. Step over pavement cracks, play I-spy, or count things you spot.

Walk to the park

With your supervision, encourage your child to explore and enjoy the playground equipment - swings, slides, climbing frames and anything else available. It's a great way to build confidence, coordination, and have fun outdoors.

Picnic blanket games

Play simple ball games with your baby while relaxing on a blanket.

You can also become a climbing frame! Let your baby crawl over, under, and around you to build strength and coordination.

Puddle play

Encourage your child to splash through shallow puddles, watch their reflections in the water, and float leaves or other safe natural items. It's a simple way to enjoy nature and spark curiosity during outdoor play.

Walk to the park

Encourage children to play chase with each other - or with you - on grassy areas or around trees. Older kids can hop or skip to help younger ones keep up. Try moving from object to object by running, hopping, skipping, or jumping.



Play parks and green spaces!



Why not visit the playparks and green spaces below.

Kirkwall Play Parks:

- Papdale Primary School
- Glaitness Park
- Pickaquoy Centre
- Balfour Hospital
- Watson Close
- Summerdale
- Broadsands Road
- Manse Road
- Brandyquoy Park
- Hordaland
- Weyland
- Kirkwall Skate Park

East Mainland Parks:

- Deerness Community Centre
- Burray Primary School
- Holm Village
- Hope Primary School and Thorfinn Place (St Margaret's Hope)

Green spaces:

- Finstown Community Gardens
- Happy Valley
- Beaches
- Binscarth Woods
- Bignold Park
- Tankerness House Gardens
- Peedie Sea
- Willows
- Multi-use games area at KGS

West Mainland Play Parks:

- Firth Primary School
- Evie Primary School
- Dounby Primary School
- Birsay Community Centre
- Stenness Primary School
- Orphir Primary School
- South End (Stromness)
- Pumpwell Park (Stromness)
- Marwick Park (Stromness)
- Faravel Park (Stromness)
- Stromness Community Centre

Ferry-linked Isles Parks:

- North Walls Community School and Longhope (Hoy)
- Flotta Community Centre
- Rousay Primary School
- Shapinsay Primary School
- Stronsay School
- Eday Primary School
- Sanday Community School
- Westray Junior High School
- Papa Westray School
- North Ronaldsay School

Top tips for active children

- Support them in safe risk taking
- Have a mixture of guided and child-led play
- Create a safe space to roam
- Model an active lifestyle
- Limit their screen time
- Stick to consistent bedtimes so children get enough sleep
- Be patient with progress - learning new skills takes time
- Try to celebrate effort, not competition
- Have fun altogether!

Screen time

Many parents use TV or tablets to keep little ones occupied, especially during busy moments like making dinner. It's a practical choice sometimes! However, it's helpful to know the impact over use of screen time can have on their development:

- Reduces time for active play
- Affects brain and language development
- Lower energy use
- Can contribute to weight gain
- Encourages sitting for long periods
- Can cause irritability and restlessness

Watching TV together is better than watching alone - chatting about what's on screen helps build language and social skills.



UK guidance suggests keeping screen time under 2 hours a day, with some screen-free days for balance.