

Starting the Conversation: Staying Well & Being Active

There has never been a more important time to have conversations about the importance of being active and the impact it has on our health and wellbeing. This quick guide has been produced by our team of Occupational Therapists, to enable you to have these conversations and to encourage other people who you may support to be part of those conversations as well.

Why is being active so Important?

There is a very important relationship between what we do and our health and wellbeing. When people become unwell, injure themselves, or experience difficult times, it often becomes harder for them to do the things that are important to them. Doing a range of things that you enjoy, which are not too stressful or too easy, can also improve health and make people feel better, about themselves and the world around them. Being physically active has a positive impact on our wellbeing. It can prevent ill health, boost our energy levels, improve our mood and provide social opportunities. Introducing regular physical activity as part of our everyday lives will help us to support and maintain our wellbeing and provide immediate and long term health benefits.

Why can it be difficult?

Our experiences of physical activity and being active are very personal to us. There are many reasons why people can find it difficult to start thinking and talking about getting involved in physical activity. Having a disability, a long term health condition, poor mental health, negative previous experiences, a fear of the unknown, a lack of information or resources, and no-one to help, are just some of the many reasons why someone might be inactive. One or several of these reasons may become a barrier to people being active and doing the things that they need and want to do, in order to maintain their health and wellbeing. However, with the right support, we can build our readiness to try new activities and/or return to past, loved, hobbies and interests.

What do we mean by physical activity and being active?

Physical activity is any body movement that works your muscles and requires more energy than resting. This includes sport and exercise, but it also includes other activities we do in our daily lives, which can be introduced or increased for the purpose of improving our health and wellbeing. Examples include activities such as walking, cleaning, and gardening. Any physical activity is better than none and it is never too late to get started.

Conversation Top tips

- Ask people about how they normally spend their time – get them to tell you about a typical day and make sure you keep focused on what is important and enjoyable for that person.
- Find out about what people do (and don't!) like to do.
- Remember that simply doing more physical activity isn't always what is healthy – at times some people may have too much to do – a good balance is what is important.
- Set achievable and meaningful goals, be realistic and acknowledge there may be steps back, as well as forwards. People's circumstances and mind-set can change over time.
- Carefully plan and agree any new physical activity, to ensure it is realistic, motivates them, and provides a sense of achievement. There are resources available to help you to do this.
- Talk about and acknowledge barriers – someone might need help to go out, or have limited space and resources to be active.
- Remember to explore both physical and mental health in relation to people being active – not just what they physically can or can't do, but how they feel.
- Celebrate ALL achievements, however small they seem – small steps over time gradually become big leaps!

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Ask

Ask people about how they normally spend their time –
What is a typical day like? Are weekends and weekdays different?
How do they feel about how they spend their time?

Listen

Find out what matters to them –
What activities are important to you?
What do you need and want to do in your life?

Reflect

These questions are really important – they help you find out about that individual person and what matters to them.

Learn

Explain to people why being active is important – Having a good mix and balance of things to do in our daily lives can reduce the chance of us developing some health conditions and keep us well. Being active improves our health and can make us feel better. Being active doesn't have to mean sport and physical activity, it can include everyday things, like walking and gardening.

Reflect

Link back what people have already told you about what they do or want to do – give examples based on what they have told you they enjoy/want to do.

Explore

If people aren't doing much physical activity in their daily lives it can help them keep healthy and feel better to do a bit more, but be sensitive and make sure you don't make them feel bad about what they are doing – this could reduce motivation even more. Doing more is often best done gradually – in small steps. Also, suggest they try doing things they are currently doing in different ways (like walking at different speeds or to different places).

Reflect

Explore how doing physical activity has impacted on their life in a positive way previously/currently.

Collaborate

Once you have found out about the person, what they need and want to do, and built a relationship with them, you can ask if they would like to set goals around being active. They might want to do this or they might not. Remember to think about what matters to and motivates them.

Reflect

Give examples of non-physical goals, for example how doing things differently in their everyday life might also build social skills and self-esteem.

Plan

When discussing and agreeing goals remember to be realistic and fully explore what options are available to the person. You will need to discuss things such as their environment (what is their housing situation like? Do they have outdoor space? Do they live with other people? Are they able to mobilise and travel independently? Is the cost of some physical activity sessions a barrier? Is there an identified risk or health need to consider?) There are lots of things to think about and explore and this may take some time. Just one thing going wrong or not being considered can stop someone being active.



Support

There are many organisations that can offer support and signposting. Consider: Does the person have access to the internet? There are live classes, activities and lots of further information about activity, health and wellbeing at: www.activeessex.org and www.sportforconfidence.com. Using Outdoor space for activities (remaining compliant with guidelines) eg: walking, jogging, running, cycling. Clubs and groups might not be on at the moment, but most are still happy to talk about what they offer and what to expect when they return. If no internet access, and a postal address is provided please share offline resources for physical activity ideas. Or email administration@activeessex.org for further information.



Celebrate

Celebrate achievements (however small they seem – managing to do the same as last week is still an achievement!)