

# What's motivating child's play?

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Altering parents' and teachers' notion of risk taking behaviour can significantly increase children's physical activity suggests a study lead by University of Sydney researchers.

The results of the [Sydney Playground Project](#) published online in the *Preventive Medicine Journal* show simple, low cost, additions to a playground can increase [physical activity](#) and decreases children's [sedentary behavior](#) during recess times. However parental and teachers' concerns for safety and being sued remain a concern.

Lead investigator Professor Anita Bundy from the University's Faculty of Health Sciences says the trial may have helped reverse [parents and teachers' perception](#) of what constitutes risky play activities by assisting them to understand what can motivate and encourage children to be physically active and socialise with their peers.

Twelve Australian primary schools participated in the project which simultaneously focused on the school children aged between five-to-seven years, their parents and their teachers.

The initial phase of the three-year project involved a 13-week intervention program. The program that introduced new objects such as cardboard boxes, old car tyres, colourful fabrics, and [Styrofoam](#) and milk crates into schoolyards, thereby giving children opportunities for creative, [outdoor play](#).

Workshops were also conducted with parents and teachers to discuss

play and perceptions around risk taking related to play.

"We wanted to capture children's intrinsic motivations to play, increase their physical activity during break times, while simultaneously helping adults reconsider their views on risky play behaviour," says Professor Bundy.

"What we found was these simple objects coupled with an [education program](#) for parents and teachers significantly increased the children's activity levels."

Whether the increases measured can be maintained remains to be seen says Professor Bundy but evidence in one school suggests they can.

"We retested children in one intervention school after two years and they had maintained their gains," she states.

Trial project manager Lina Engelen says schools and preschools are ideal sites for interventions to promote physical activity either within the school's PE curriculum or via breaks such as recess and lunchtime.

"If break times are to promote physical activity in a sustained manner then available activities must be highly motivating, such as active play and have adults' support," Dr Engelen says. Children of all sizes and shapes were delighted by the playground initiative she adds.

Provided by University of Sydney

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