

# Study assesses mothers' attitudes towards government activity targets for preschool children

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The research aimed to examine mothers' attitudes to UK government guidelines which state that children under five years who can walk unaided should be physically active for at least three hours each day. This activity, which mainly consists of active play in this age group, can be of any intensity and spread throughout the day. Mothers' attitudes to these targets, which were developed by the government in 2011, are key to influencing physical activity and sedentary behaviour in children under five.

Researchers interviewed 24 mothers whose children were aged between two and five years old from four areas of varying socio-economic status within Bristol.

The team found the majority of mothers interviewed were unaware of the government's physical activity and sedentary behaviour guidelines for [preschool children](#). Although nearly all mothers felt that their pre-school child easily achieved the government's targets, they also said they did not know how to calculate how much physical activity their child did in a day. Preschool children were seen as naturally active and mothers commented that there was no more capacity from the parent or child to achieve more activity. Mothers were concerned that the guidelines could cause feelings of stress and guilt for mothers of young children if they were asked to increase physical activity or reduce sedentary behaviour in their child.

Mothers who took part in a study about their attitudes towards physical activity and sedentary behaviour levels of preschool children do not feel that government targets are relevant to their child, according to new University of Bristol research. The findings, published today in the journal *BMJ Open*, suggests that information to help mothers make more accurate assessments of their child's activity levels should be provided alongside the guidelines.

Reducing sedentary behaviour time spent in car seats and pushchairs was not seen as feasible by some mothers. While reducing screen-viewing time was seen as appropriate, most mothers were happy with the amount of time their pre-school child watched television. Some parents admitted it was easy to lose track of how much time their child spent watching television and some used it as a

'coping strategy' to allow them time to undertake household chores or rest themselves.

Georgina Bentley, the study's lead researcher from Bristol's Centre for Academic Primary Care in the School of Social and Community Medicine, said: "Our analysis suggests that presenting mothers with [physical activity](#) and sedentary behaviour targets is not sufficient to instigate [behaviour change](#) and further actions are needed to improve health during early childhood.

"Providing [mothers](#) with information on the how they can make a more accurate assessment of their preschool child's activity and sedentary behaviour levels, and giving them information about the benefits of increasing activity and reduced sedentary behaviour, is likely to be more effective than providing targets alone."

**More information:** "Mothers' perceptions of the UK physical activity and sedentary behaviour guidelines for the early years (Start Active, Stay Active): a qualitative study." *BMJ Open*. [bmjopen.bmj.com/content/5/9/e008383.short](https://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/5/9/e008383.short)

Provided by University of Bristol

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