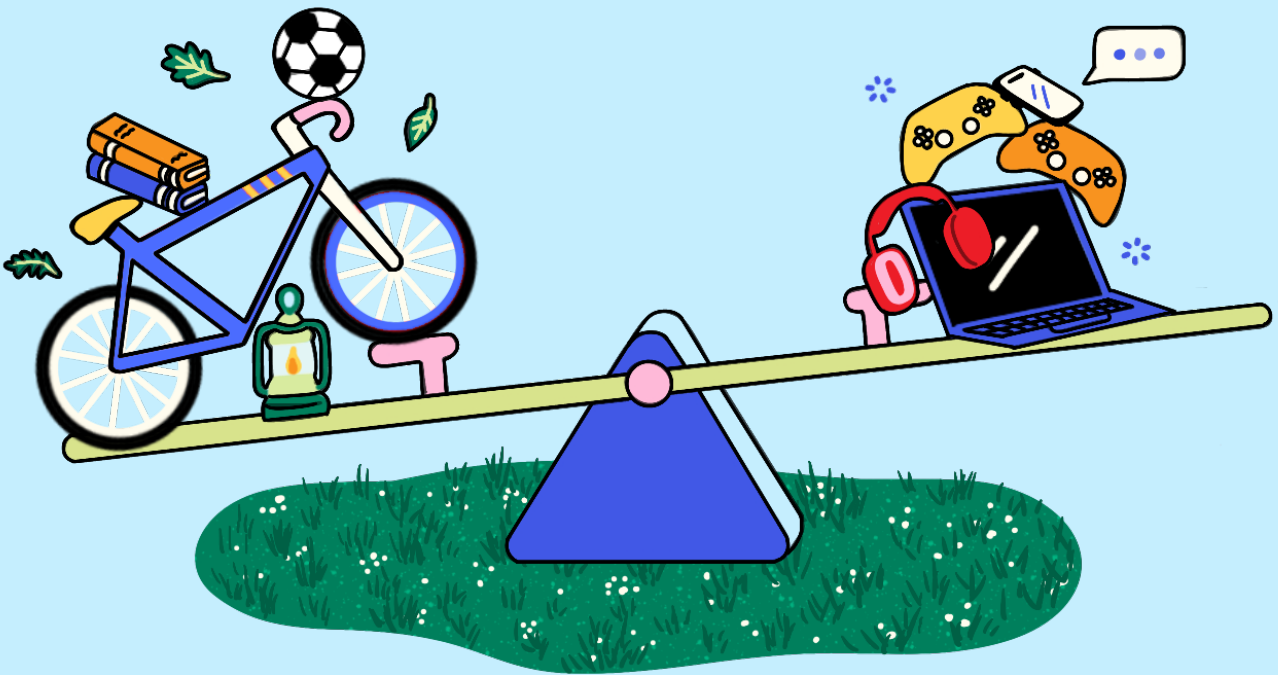


Tech/Life Balance:  
Helping Families Thrive in a Digital World

# Movement and Outdoor Activity Family Guide



California Partners  
PROJECT

**This Guide offers the following resources:**

**TOOL 1:** Pinpoint Barriers

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**TOOL 2:** Connect Through Movement

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**TOOL 3:** Model, Model, Model!



## Introduction

Screens are a part of life, but movement is essential for growth and well-being. While technology can create tension in family life, outdoor activities provide a chance to reconnect. This guide offers bite-sized, family-tested ideas to help kids and caregivers reclaim outdoor play and active habits.

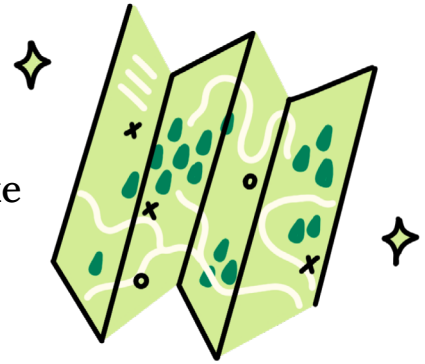
“The number one predictor of a kid’s physical activity behavior is their parents’ physical activity behavior.”

**Dr. Charles Hillman**, Co-Director of the Center for Cognitive and Brain Health at Northeastern University

## TOOL 1

# Pinpoint Barriers

Identify the specific challenges or barriers that make it hard for your family to prioritize movement and outdoor time—and find ways to overcome them.



## Common Barriers

### Tech Is Taking Over

- Do you feel like screen time is replacing other important activities, like moving their bodies or playing outside?
- Are you worried about changes in your child's mood or behavior after they've been on a device for too long?

### Concerns About Safety

- Are you uncomfortable letting your child play outside without constant supervision?
- Do concerns about your child's safety (e.g., traffic, strangers, or crime) influence how much independence and freedom you give your child to explore?

“How it feels to be online is something I talk with my son about a lot about. He'll say, ‘Sometimes my stomach feels sick,’ and I say, ‘That's a time to disengage and go outside.’”

**Mother**

### Time and Money

- Does your neighborhood have enough parks and green spaces close by for your child or family to enjoy?
- Can your family afford to participate in local recreation programs, like sports leagues or community activities?

### Cultural Pressures

- Does your family schedule leave little room for free play?
- Do you fear others will judge you if you let your child play outside alone or unsupervised with friends?

### Environmental Factors

- Do extreme temperatures or bad weather keep your family from outdoor activities?
- Does your child spend a lot of time on digital devices because they can't go outside due to weather (extreme heat, rain, cold) or air quality (pollution, wildfire smoke, allergens)?

## Conversation Starters

### For Younger Kids

**What's your favorite thing to do outside?**  
Do you think we could do it more often?

**If we could pick one thing to do outside this week,** what would you want to try, or where would you like to go?

**What do you like about playing outside compared to** watching shows or playing games on a tablet?

**If we spent less time on screens,** what fun things could we do together instead?

**What would you do if you ever felt uncomfortable or unsafe** while playing outside? Let's come up with a plan together.

**How can we move and play** when it's too hot or rainy to go outside?

### For Older Kids

**Do you think screen time keeps you from doing other things you enjoy,** like playing sports or hanging out outside? Why or why not?

**How do you feel after you've spent time on your device compared to** after you've gone for a walk or played outside?

**What kinds of safety rules or plans** do you think are important for being out on your own?

**What makes a park or outdoor spot a good place** for you and your friends to spend time?

**How do you like to spend your free time?** Do you think you have enough of it?

**If we can't go outside today,** what's something active we could do together inside that sounds fun to you?



**Spending just 20–30 minutes in nature can significantly lower stress levels, and those who spend at least two hours outdoors each week report better overall health and well-being.**

[Parks Prescription >](#)

## TOOL 2

# Connect Through Movement

Strengthen family bonds by making movement and outdoor play fun, intentional, and collaborative.



## Actionable Strategies

### Leverage Tech Wisely

Technology doesn't have to be solely for passive screen time—it can help kids (and parents!) get moving.

**1000 Hours Outside** – An app that helps families track outdoor time, set movement goals, and get inspired with activity ideas to spend more time in nature together.

**AllTrails** – A family-friendly app that makes it easy to discover kid-friendly hiking, walking, and biking trails across the nation.

**Apple Health** – A built-in iPhone app that tracks daily activity, steps, and workouts—use it to set movement goals as a family.

**FitBit** – A wearable fitness tracker that monitors steps, heart rate, and sleep, helping families and kids set goals, track movement, and stay motivated.

**Geocaching** – A real-world treasure hunt app that guides users to hidden containers (geocaches) using GPS, turning any outing into an adventure.

**GoNoodle** – A movement-based app with fun, interactive videos that get kids dancing, stretching, and playing active games.

“Help your kids be more aware. Your time is literally your life, so be conscious of how you use it.”

Dr. Judy Chu

**Across all types of social media use, teens with strong parental relationships have significantly better mental health outcomes.**

*Gallup Survey, 2023* >

**Google Fit** – A health-tracking app for Android users that monitors activity and movement goals—perfect for parents and kids who want to stay active together.

**iNaturalist** – A free app that helps you identify the plants and animals around you while generating data for science and conservation.

## Actionable Strategies

**Just Dance Now** – A mobile version of the popular dance game that lets kids and families follow choreographed routines to popular songs.

**Nike Training Club** – A free workout app with guided strength, yoga, and cardio sessions, including fun, family-friendly workouts for all fitness levels.

**Pokémon GO** – A location-based game that encourages walking and exploring outdoors to find and catch virtual Pokémon.

**Seek** – A nature exploration app that uses image recognition to help kids and families identify plants, animals, and fungi while outdoors.

**SkyView** – An app that helps kids and families explore the night sky, identifying stars, planets, and constellations by pointing their device at the sky.

**Strava** – A fitness tracking app that logs runs, bike rides, and other activities—great for families who want to track movement and stay motivated together.

### Discover Outdoor Spaces

You might be surprised by what’s nearby! Use available resources to find parks, trails, and other accessible outdoor spots for movement and play.

#### National Parks in California

##### California State Parks

- [Free Library Parks Pass](#)
- [Golden Bear Pass](#) (CalWorks and Tribal TANF recipients only)
- [Adventure Pass](#) (4th Graders and their families)
- [FamCamp](#)

#### California Regional and County Parks ([PDF list](#))

##### Community Schools

- [Community School Parks in Los Angeles](#)
- [San Francisco Unified Shared Schoolyards](#)

##### Searchable Apps

- [Outbound](#)
- [OuterSpacial](#)
- [ParkPassport](#)
- [Parkscape](#)
- [Playground Buddy](#)

“For kids who lack access to safe or suitable outdoor spaces—whether it’s too hot, too cold, or simply not safe to go outside, exergames only require a few feet of living room space, making them a great indoor alternative.”

**Dr. Amanda Staiano**, Developmental Psychologist & Associate Professor of Pediatric Obesity and Health Behavior at Louisiana State University

## Actionable Strategies

“In past generations, kids had more freedom to move around their neighborhoods with friends, but today, we’re often more hesitant to give them that independence. Having conversations with your kids about which areas are okay to explore, or setting rules like always having a buddy, can help parents feel more comfortable while giving kids a bit of freedom. It often works well to set those parameters together.”

**Dr. Valerie Carson**, Professor of Kinesiology, Sport, and Recreation at the University of Alberta

### Think Outside The Box

When getting outside isn’t possible due to weather or environmental barriers, movement doesn’t have to stop. Get creative at home or think beyond your house.

- Build a fort
- Play hide and seek
- Have a dance party
- Play balloon hot potato
- Create an obstacle course
- Go to an indoor swimming pool (check out your local YMCA or rec center)
- Visit a trampoline park
- Find an indoor play space (search “indoor play space near me”)
- Try an escape room (great for older kids!)

### Make It Easy

Make it easy for kids to get outside by keeping simple supplies on hand like sunblock, hats, flashlights, headlamps, reflective gear/tape, and warm clothes. When getting outside is hassle-free, they’re more likely to do it! For more suggestions for nature-based, developmentally-appropriate activities, check out [Digging Into Nature](#).

For other quick tips check out resources from the California [Move Your Body, Calm Your Mind](#) campaign.

### Help Kids Gain Independence

If safety concerns make it hard to give your kids more freedom, check out this [parent tool](#) from research lab [Outside Play](#)—it offers a personalized plan to address worries. You can also explore [Let Grow’s resources](#) for practical steps to build your child’s confidence and independence.

## Things to Keep In Mind

### Be Open and Flexible

Some days, energy levels, weather, or safety concerns will impact plans—adjust and make it work. Too hot? Try an indoor dance-off. Unsure what to do? Offer choices like a walk, bike ride, or backyard game. Even 15 minutes counts!

### Guide, Don't Decide

A child's own attitude toward outdoor play is one of the biggest predictors of how much time they spend outside. Give kids a say in how they move and help them to associate outdoor time with having fun and being social, not something that is forced on them.

### Focus on Connection, Not Perfection

Movement isn't about hitting fitness goals; it's about spending time together at every age. Play a game or just go for a walk and talk. Let your child or teen take the lead; some thrive in structured activities, while others prefer free time to explore. What matters most is making movement a positive, low-pressure experience.

“I practice volleyball or play basketball with my daughter. It serves both as physical activity and a way to have a parent-child relationship and disconnect from technology. She has also expressed to us many times how she's feeling or things she hasn't said before.”

Parent

“Approach it with a mindset of what's doable, without putting too much pressure on it. When it comes to exercise, time in nature, movement, or play, even small doses really count.”

**Dr. Devika Bhushan**, Pediatrician and former California Chief Health Officer



## TOOL 3

# Model, Model, Model!

Model and reflect on your own habits around movement and outdoor time—your actions shape your child’s relationship with staying active.



“Kids notice if you’re saying they need to be active but then see you checking your phone the moment you get out of bed. It’s not just about having a strategy; it’s about being comfortable sticking to it and modeling it.”

**Anya Kamenetz**, Author of *The Art of Screen Time: How Your Family Can Balance Digital Media and Real Life*

## Mindful Questions

*When was the last time I tried something active or new with my kids?*

*Do I intentionally schedule time for movement or outdoor activities, both for myself and for my family?*

*Am I using technology intentionally to complement movement, or do I mostly use my devices passively for entertainment?*

*Do I encourage movement as a family activity, or do I leave it to my kids to figure out how to stay active?*

## Practical Tips

### Start Small, Show Consistency

- Kids notice your habits, even the little ones.
- Model movement in small, everyday ways—stretch while making coffee, walk instead of scrolling during breaks, or opt for a short post-dinner stroll.
- Your consistency sends a powerful message, even if it’s just a few minutes per day.

### Move How You Want Them to Move

- If you want your child to see movement as fun and normal, show them how!
- Choose activities you genuinely enjoy such as dancing, biking, or hiking.
- Try scheduling movement or time in nature! When kids see you prioritizing movement, they’ll be more likely to do the same.

## Get Started, Take Action

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Sit down with your child to talk about what might make it hard to get outside—and come up with a list of activities you'd both enjoy to get moving.

**What's getting in the way?**

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**What could we try this week?**

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## What Caregivers Can Do

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The first step in helping your child develop active habits is to be mindful of how you balance screen time with movement throughout your day.

**How can we lead by example?**

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**What activities do we want to add to our lifestyle?**

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This guide was created by the California Partners Project in partnership with California First Partner Jennifer Siebel Newsom, and with support from Young Futures. For more tips and resources for families, visit [www.calpartnersproject.org](http://www.calpartnersproject.org).