



Supporting your child's well-being

As parents/caregivers, we want our children to grow up physically and mentally healthy, to build meaningful relationships, and to successfully navigate life's challenges. We want them to have confidence and to feel emotionally healthy and strong. In short, we want our children to have a strong sense of well-being.

This resource was developed to assist parents/caregivers in supporting their child's well-being.

Note: While we use the term "child" throughout, we recognize that the child in your care may be a teenager or young adult, and that you may be caring for more than one child.

What is well-being?

A sense of well-being involves both feeling good and functioning well. It includes having positive emotions, like happiness, and working towards becoming your best self. It also means having a sense of purpose, feeling like what you do matters, and having healthy, supportive relationships with others. For children, these factors contribute to healthy development and a positive sense of self.

Why is well-being important?

Children with a sense of well-being feel like they belong, which supports a positive self-image, healthy relationship skills, and the ability to manage difficulties. Additionally, they are more motivated and engaged in learning. Alternatively, when children lack a sense of well-being, they may find it difficult to trust others and to feel optimistic about their development and growth, and they may find it difficult to recover from setbacks.

How can I support my child's well-being?

As a parent/caregiver, you play an essential role in nurturing your child's well-being. The following list provides an overview of some factors that are important for a child's well-being:

Food and Nutrition

Eating well supports children's physical growth and development, improves mood and concentration, and maintains energy throughout the day. This boosts learning, helps stress management and emotional regulation, and improves overall well-being.

Tips for supporting a positive relationship with food:

- Eat a variety of foods such as vegetables and fruits, whole grains and plant-based proteins. As your child explores new foods, remember that accepting them is a skill that takes time to develop.



- When possible, involve your child with food/meal preparation.
- Eat meals with your child when possible and encourage mindful eating by turning off screens.
- Avoid labeling foods as “healthy”, “unhealthy”, “treats”, “everyday” or “junk” foods. This can create shame and judgement. Instead call foods by their name. All foods can be a part of a healthy diet as they support both nutrition and enjoyment.

For reliable food and nutrition information, visit UnlockFood.ca – a resource developed by Canadian Dietitians.

Healthy body image

Nurturing a positive body image is important for your child’s well-being. Try to be mindful of how you talk about your body and eating.

Tips for nurturing positive body image:

- Teach your child to be critical of media.
- Model positive body talk to your child.
- Celebrate bodies of all shapes and sizes.
- If you are going to give a compliment, focus on those that highlight qualities, abilities and skills instead of appearance.

Sleep

Sleep is crucial for mental and physical health. Inadequate sleep negatively impacts mood, concentration, learning, physical activity and the ability to cope with challenges.

Age/Recommended sleep:

Ages 5-13 years old	9-11 hours of sleep/night
Ages 14-17 years old	8-10 hours of sleep/night

Tips to help your child to get a good night’s sleep:

- Set a bedtime/sleep routine that works for you and your child.
- Limit screen use to 1 to 2 hours before bed.
- Encourage your child to talk about their worries; excess worry can interfere with sleep.

Physical activity

Physical activity is important for your child’s mental and physical well-being. It is recommended that your child gets at least an hour of moderate to vigorous physical activity each day. [The Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines for Children and Youth \(ages 5-17\)](#) encourages the following each day for your child:

- **Sweat** (moderate to vigorous physical activity) – an accumulation of at least 60 minutes per day, including a variety of aerobic activities. Examples of this type of exercise include biking, swimming, walking, running, climbing, and jumping.
- **Step** (light physical activity) – several hours of a variety of structured and unstructured light physical activities, such as light walking around school between classes.

Ontario schools have a Daily Physical Activity (DPA) which requires schools to ensure that all elementary students have a minimum of 20 minutes of moderate to vigorous activity each school day.



Some children may have difficulty with some forms of physical activity because of medical or mobility issues. It is possible to adapt ideas for healthy active living, appealing to your child's interests and strengths (e.g., seated stretching or dancing, modified activities on low air quality days for young people with asthma).

Tips to encourage physical activity:

- Try to be physically active as a family when possible – take walks or bike rides together.
- Carve out time during the day for your child to engage in physical activity – playing at the playground after school or walking to and from school.
- Take an interest in the types of physical activity your child enjoys and create opportunities for them to explore these whenever possible.

Play

Structured and unstructured play are core parts of your child's development and central to their physical, social, and mental health. Play helps build confidence and boosts decision-making and problem-solving skills.

Phrases that help support your child to safely explore free play:

- Do you feel... stable on that log of wood/with the heat of that fire?
- Notice how... these rocks are slippery/this tool is sharp?
- Are you feeling... scared/excited/safe?
- How will you... get down/go up/go across?
- Do you have...the equipment/clothing that you need?

Keep in mind that adolescents, teens (and even adults) still benefit from play, even though it may look different with age.

Screen Time

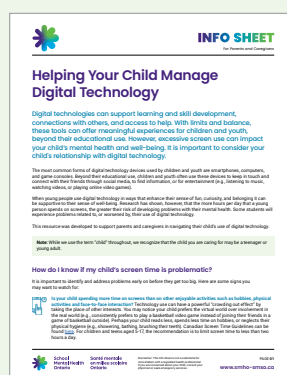
Electronics and screens allow us to communicate and connect; however, when used excessively, they can negatively impact our mental health. The Canadian Pediatric Society recommends:

- For children aged 2-5, limit screen time to less than one hour a day.
- For children and teens aged 5-17, limit screen time to less than two hours a day.

Tips to establish healthy screen habits at home:

- Set age-appropriate screen time limits for your child and role model with your own screen usage.
- Turn off the TV at mealtimes and when no one is watching.
- Avoid using screens 1 to 2 hours before bed to support sleep.

To learn more about navigating your child's use of digital technology, see: [Helping your child to manage digital technology](#)



Healthy Relationships and Social Skills:

Alongside basics like nutritious food and sleep, you help to shape your child's attitude towards safe and trusting relationships*, society, school and learning, and life goals.

To learn more about how to support your child to build healthy and strong relationships see: [Building a strong supportive relationship with your child](#) and [Helping your child build positive relationships and manage conflict](#).

The image shows two 'INFO SHEET' cards from the Ontario Ministry of Education. The left card is titled 'Building a strong, supportive relationship with your child' and the right card is titled 'Helping your child build positive relationships and manage conflict'. Both cards include text, bullet points, and QR codes.

Where can I go for support?

If you have concerns or questions about your child's overall well-being, you can speak with your child's classroom teacher or another school staff member with whom you feel comfortable, your family doctor and/or your local [public health unit](#) for resources and support.

References

Canada, H. (2022, March 16). *SECTION 1 Foundation for healthy eating*. Canada Food Guide. <https://food-guide.canada.ca/en/guidelines/section-1-foundation-healthy-eating/>

Children & Youth 5-17 Years – 24-Hour Movement Guidelines. (n.d.). Retrieved October 24, 2024, from <https://csepguidelines.ca/guidelines/children-youth/>

Guidelines and Tools. (n.d.). *Eating Disorders Ontario*. Retrieved October 24, 2024, from <https://eatingdisordersontario.ca/prevention/guidelines-tools-prevention/>

Ruggeri, K., Garcia-Garzon, E., Maguire, Á., Matz, S., & Huppert, F. A. (2020). Well-being is more than happiness and life satisfaction: a multidimensional analysis of 21 countries. *Health and Quality of Life Outcomes*, 18(1), 192. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12955-020-01423-y>

Sleep for children and youth. (2022, March 18). <https://www.cheo.on.ca/en/resources-and-support/p5643.aspx>

Society, C. P. (n.d.). *Screen time and preschool children: Promoting health and development in a digital world | Canadian Paediatric Society*. Retrieved October 24, 2024, from <https://cps.ca/en/documents/position/screen-time-and-preschool-children>

The importance of risky play for childhood development. (n.d.). SickKids. Retrieved October 24, 2024, from <https://www.sickkids.ca/en/news/archive/2024/the-importance-of-risky-play-for-childhood-development/>