

- Child development

HOW TO KEEP KIDS ACTIVE EVEN IN LOCKDOWN

LIZ CONNOR speaks to dad-of-two and Olympic Gold medallist Greg Rutherford about how to motivate children to be physically active at home

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KIDS are spending a lot more time at home at the moment which means they're missing out on vital exercise, whether that's a daily walk to the school gates or running around the playground at break times.



With the absence of their usual hobbies and activities, children can easily become sedentary, putting them at higher risk of health issues like obesity and diabetes. "It's hugely important for everyone to be as active as they can at the moment," says retired Olympic long jump champion Greg Rutherford.

Greg, who has two boys himself (Milo, six and Rex, three) says: "Statistics show that children are regressing, and while we know it's difficult when parents are trying to work and organise the household, we need to maintain a level of fitness so we can keep our children healthy and well."

Here, the Olympic champ shares his best parenting tips for getting kids moving...

1 MAKE IT FUN

NOBODY likes the idea of being dragged out of bed for a military-style bootcamp in the mornings, especially small children who might not understand the importance of exercise. "Don't make it too intense," warns Greg. "For example, me and the children have been doing regular dance parties in the front room, where we put some upbeat pop music on and just let loose. "At six and three, the dance moves are questionable to say the least, but the boys are moving and they're enjoying it too. It's great to see them a bit red-faced and it's hilariously fun for us parents too."

2 FIND THEIR HAPPY MOVEMENT

THERE are those children that enjoy charging around the room to burn off their excited energy, while others might thrive in a calming yoga session. "Everyone knows their children best and there's no one magic way to engage them in exercise," says Greg. "Sport England's Join The Movement Hub ([sportengland.org/jointhmovement](https://www.sportengland.org/jointhmovement)) is a really great tool if you're struggling for inspiration, as there are lots of video workouts you can take part in with the kids that include things like Marvel and Disney characters.

“My kids have really been enjoying the Harry Potter workouts, as they love the fact they can exercise while doing spells with Professor Snape.”

3 DON'T WORRY IF YOU DON'T HAVE OUTDOOR SPACE

“MY YOUNGEST son isn't keen on the cold and it's been raining non-stop here, so we've found that it's really important to get creative in the house,” says the Olympian. “I get the kids to do some circuits with me in the living room when the weather isn't great. The moves are modified for kids; it's movement and activity they can easily follow.” Greg adds that if you only have a small room to play with, you can still get the blood pumping by opting for 'no space' movements like body squats and running on the spot.

4 SET A GOOD EXAMPLE

KIDS are much more likely to get on board with an activity session if they can see that mum or dad are excited about throwing on their gym kit too. “Being involved is really important and, as the parent, you have to show you're willing to muck in with the activities,” says Greg. Crucially though, you shouldn't see it as a chore. “The joy you get from being silly with your children is wonderful and it's a great stress-reliever too,” he adds.

5 BRING IN REWARDS

“WE AIM for our kids to be active for at least an hour a day,” says Greg, adding that it can really help kids to stay on track with their sleep patterns. “There can be a little bit of bribery sometimes,” he admits. “There are some days where our kids just aren't in the mood and we'll say they can have a treat if they take part in their active time. “Obviously you don't want to throw sweets at them all the time, moderation is key, but remember that it's a hard time for children at the moment, so go easy on them if they're having a bad day.”

6 SPLIT UP THE ACTIVE TIME

“ACTIVITY doesn't have to all be in one go,” the sports star says. “You can split it up into little 10 or 15 minute active intervals throughout the day. I find that it breaks up schooling and weekends, (and) gives them a sense of routine during a very unusual time.” He adds that kids would usually have break times in school, so sticking to some kind of routine with their exercise can help their mental health too. “Anything we can do as parents to keep kids happy and healthy, not just physically but mentally too, is going really going help them stay resilient during this difficult time.” Greg Rutherford has teamed up with Sport England and its Join the Movement campaign, which aims to help families and kids stay active while schools are shut. For guidance and ideas on how to keep your kids active during the pandemic, visit sportengland.org/jointhemovement