



### JUST ASK

Advice from **Nicola Read** on how to use Facebook groups and community pages to get your business seen by a new audience

Do you receive reviews regularly from the families that attend your setting? If you don't, then this statistic might just make you want to prioritise it – 93 per cent of consumers say online reviews influence their decision to buy.

Often, people don't even think to leave a testimonial, so it's always a good idea to ask. You can do this in the form of a post on your social media that links parents directly to the reviews section of your Facebook page. Instagram and Twitter don't offer a reviews option, but you could always signpost to Facebook from these platforms. You can also utilise Google for reviews too if you are registered.

Share your reviews by quoting the text and including it in a new social media post, or screenshot the review and use it as the image. This works well because it's seen as authentic social proof – people can actually see who wrote the review and when. Also, show how valued your setting is by sharing photographs of cards, flowers or gifts your team receive.

Your Ofsted report is another key piece of material. Pick out the specific areas where the inspector found strengths and quote them on your social media. For example, 'We're very proud of our GOOD grading. Here's just a snippet of what Ofsted said about us...'

Reviews and recommendations strengthen the credibility of your setting. They have the power to influence buying decisions and help build trust. Parents want to hear from other families and what their experience was – it helps them to imagine their children benefiting from similar experiences.

So ask away – when people are happy, they are often willing to endorse your business; they want to see you succeed and to have played a part in that.

→ **Nicola Read is owner of social media management company Babbl, [www.babbl.co.uk](http://www.babbl.co.uk)**

# Get moving

How should settings encourage their practitioners to take up more physical exercise? **Charlotte Goddard** reports

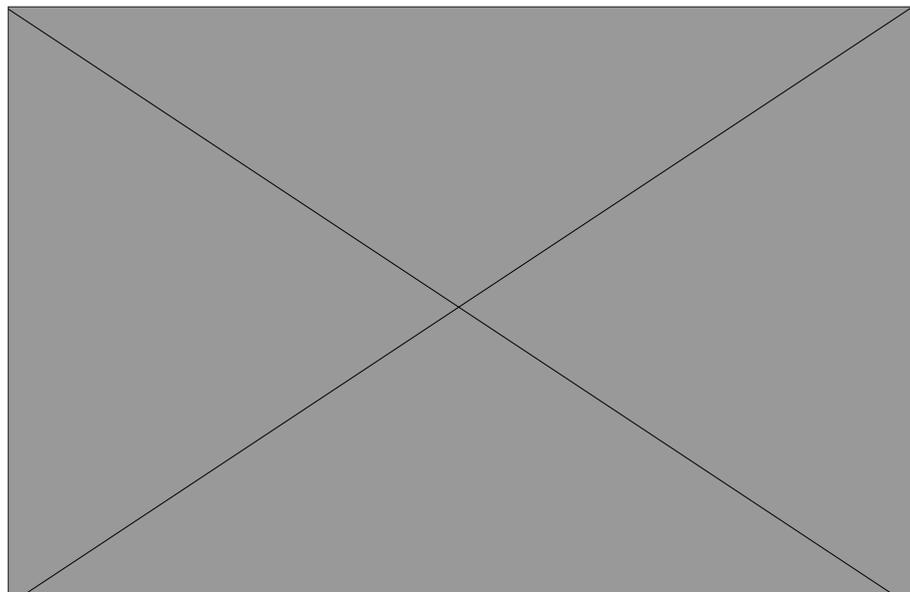


ILLUSTRATION AMANDA HUTT

**I**t may have seemed that everyone was going on walk after walk, but physical activity has plummeted during the pandemic. Sport England's latest annual survey found that in 2019/20, 27 per cent of all adults in the UK were classed as inactive, with less than 30 minutes of physical activity a week. Women, Black and Asian adults and younger adults (aged 16 to 24) have seen activity levels fall the most, according to the survey.

### Wellbeing

Physical activity is one of the most important factors in wellbeing, with a long list of positive effects, including maintaining a healthy weight, improved sleep, and a reduced risk of dementia, anxiety, depression, heart disease and some cancers. When we exercise, blood flow is increased, leading to better circulation, digestion and heart and lung function, says Dr Lala Manners, physical development trainer and director of Active Matters. When moving, our brains produce new cells that improve memory and performance, while anxiety and depression are reduced due to increased blood flow to the brain, and stress levels and cortisol production are lowered.

The NHS recommends that adults between the ages of 19 and 64 should do some kind of physical activity every day, or at least four to five days a week, including at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity

activity (such as brisk walking) or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity activity (such as running) a week. Adults should also ensure their weekly activity includes strengthening activities that work all the major muscle groups on at least two days a week.

On the face of it, early years practitioners are in a good position to incorporate movement into their day-to-day activities. 'Unlike most professionals, we have access to things that make us healthy – fresh air, decent food, not sitting down for hours at a computer, many opportunities to move throughout the day,' says Manners. The NHS even includes lifting and carrying children in its list of potential strengthening activities, alongside weightlifting and yoga, although this must be done safely.

### Barriers

However, for some practitioners, there are barriers to engaging in physical activity. 'We have become globally more sedentary, we have engineered activity out of our lives,' says Linda Baston-Pitt, chief executive of PurpleBee Learning, which delivers training on health and wellbeing. 'So, unless you're motivated to exercise, it can get harder and harder.'

'The type of women who go into childcare and the caring profession generally, not just early years, tend not to look after themselves as well as they look after others,' suggests Dr Manners. 'A huge amount of time and effort

is given to ensuring children have lots of movement play – if practitioners devoted half as much time to their own wellbeing, they would physically be in a better condition to enjoy their work days.’

Long work days and caring responsibilities can leave little time for exercise, even when settings offer reduced gym membership or put on after-work classes. ‘We do struggle with some physical wellbeing initiatives – we tried Zumba classes, for example, but found practitioners don’t really want them,’ says Sarah Fillingham, area manager and mental health and wellbeing champion at Portico Nurseries. ‘They have their own lives out of work, so don’t want to stay in work and do Zumba.’ Instead, Portico uses the Mental Health Foundation’s Five Ways to Wellbeing to suggest lifestyle changes staff can make, whether that is taking up running and swimming or simply using the stairs instead of the lift, and encourages activities such as lunchtime walks.

Just engaging with the physical activity of the children during a work day will bring benefit, says Dr Manners. ‘When children move, you move. There is a lot we can do around just gently moving throughout the day – put your hands up and touch the door frame every time you walk through the door, for example.’

Early years practitioners are not always aware of existing guidance around physical activity for children or adults, say Baston-Pitt. ‘A lot of the practitioners who are training as PANCos have said they didn’t realise how much exercise they should be getting as adults, or the kinds of exercise they should be doing,’ she says. ‘They say “It’s made me not just look at children, I started to really look at the exercise I’m doing myself”.’

PurpleBee Learning’s Start Life Well assessment tool allows nurseries to find out how engaged staff are in physical activities.

After discovering that staff participation in physical activity with children was poor, one setting decided to introduce the team to weekly walking meetings, replacing the usual office-based supervisor’s meeting. They were arranged in small groups, and discussions focused on the benefits that walking provides, such as reducing stress, lowering fatigue and boosting creativity, rather than the health value of exercise in general.

### Sensitivity

Body image is a sensitive topic and women in particular can find being asked to take part in

physical activity to be embarrassing, especially if they are overweight or obese. ‘For a lot of women, moving in a group is not part of our culture any more, and they are mortified to be asked to do it,’ says Manners.

A focus on the role of movement in improving wellbeing, rather than driving weight loss, can make a difference. For Kindred Nurseries, for example, physical activity is about boosting wellbeing (see Case study). ‘Physical and mental health go hand in hand – it’s about the feel good, not the look good,’ says Annie Tierney, head of operations. ■

## case study: Kindred Nurseries

All 21 of Kindred Nurseries’ settings have a member of staff trained as a Level 4 physical activity and nutrition co-ordinator (PANCo), whose role includes supporting staff with their own wellbeing. The group has also trained 47 Mental Health First Aiders and 15 Mental Health Champions – not just nursery staff, but also central support team workers.

Physical activity was a key focus over lockdown and the pandemic, says Annie Tierney, head of operations. The group launched the #SMILE challenge (Staying active, Mindfulness, Isolation games and activities, Laughter and Experiences) for staff and children. The Christmas Steps challenge saw the company totting up its collective step count in December, with the aim of walking the distance from their central office in Kettering, Northamptonshire to the North Pole to see Father Christmas. ‘We mapped this journey and gave

updates as we reached different places in the world to keep interest and momentum. It was 3,500 miles walked collectively over the month to get there,’ says Tierney.

Other monthly challenges include #WalkThisMay – with a spa day for the person who achieved the most steps – and Dance Like Nobody’s Watching You. ‘Our younger females were doing TikToks, and sharing them; one of our male practitioners dressed up as Ariel the mermaid,’ says Tierney. ‘It was about finding something staff could do within their day and enjoy – in the same way as working with the children, you need to find something that fires them up and is achievable.’

Feedback has been very positive, with particular appreciation for the way staff are able to share their progress and cheer on and encourage colleagues through a closed Facebook group.

## case study: London Early Years Foundation (LEYF)

LEYF is working with Active Matters’ Dr Lala Manners on resources which will encourage and support practitioners to focus on their own wellbeing. The Be Well to Do Well handbook, which will be made available to all LEYF staff, will contain ten short chapters looking at issues including being kind to yourself and the benefits of moving and exercise.

‘We began to realise health and wellbeing are so connected with body image and how practitioners feel about themselves,’ says chief executive June O’Sullivan. ‘We are sometimes critical of practitioners not getting involved with the children’s physical play, but when we asked

them, we found they were anxious about their ability to run and jump.’

Practitioners tend to concentrate on the wellbeing of children, but they need to translate that to themselves, says O’Sullivan. While LEYF offers reduced gym membership to staff, not everyone takes that up, so the handbook is looking at ways that practitioners can build movement and exercise into their workday.

‘I wanted to write it from the inside of the nursery – there is this idea that physical activity has to take place before or after work, but people forget being well is to do with where you are,’ says O’Sullivan. ‘When doing stretch activities with children, for example, it

is just as important for the staff – don’t pretend, do it properly and you will feel the benefit as well.’

Be Well to Do Well will also be available to practitioners outside LEYF for a small charge. LEYF plans to build on the knowledge and ideas set out in the handbook with workshops and staff meetings. It is important to approach the issue with tact, as body image can be a sensitive issue, says O’Sullivan. ‘Women often carry a lot of guilt – we should be thinner, smaller, other than we are,’ she says. ‘We are looking at body positivity, using movement to soothe your body. It is not about everybody becoming Joe Wicks.’