

# The Power of Physical Activity to Enhance Resilience in Young People

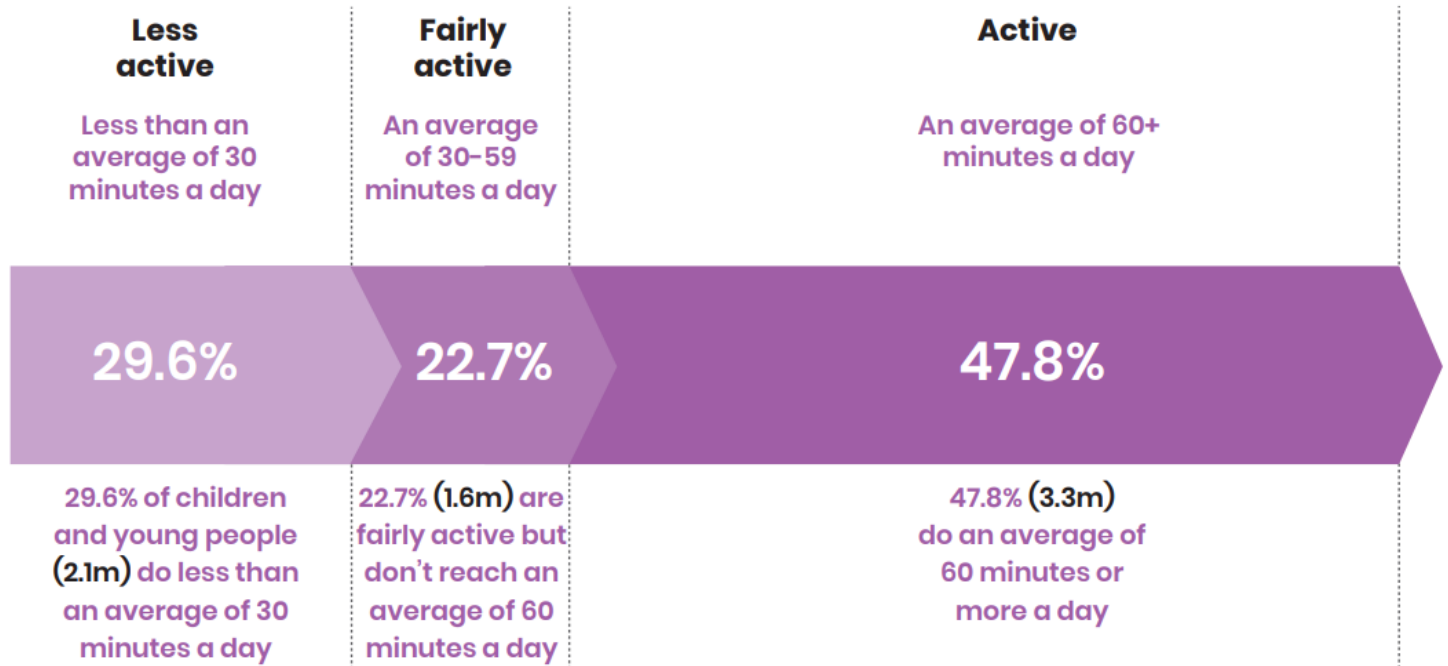
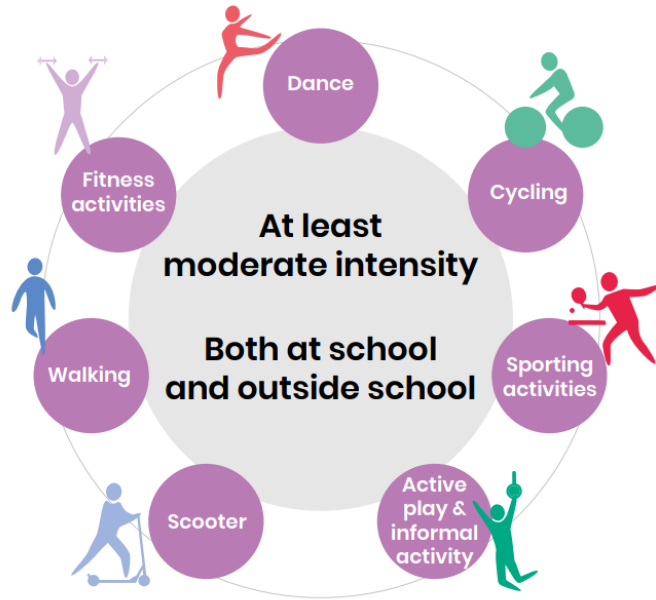
Thursday 27 November 2025

# Today's session

- This session explores how physical activity can be a powerful tool for building resilience in young people.
- We will discuss practical strategies for integrating activity into everyday learning and creating supportive environments that foster confidence, adaptability, and wellbeing - equipping young people with lifelong skills to thrive in school and beyond.

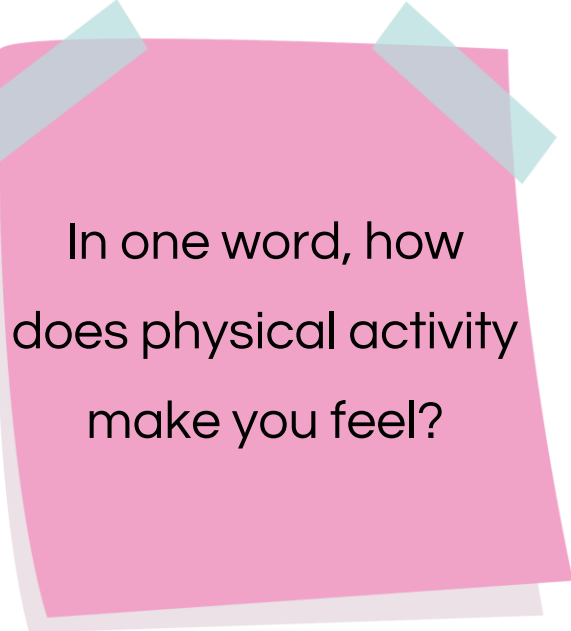
# What do we mean by physical activity

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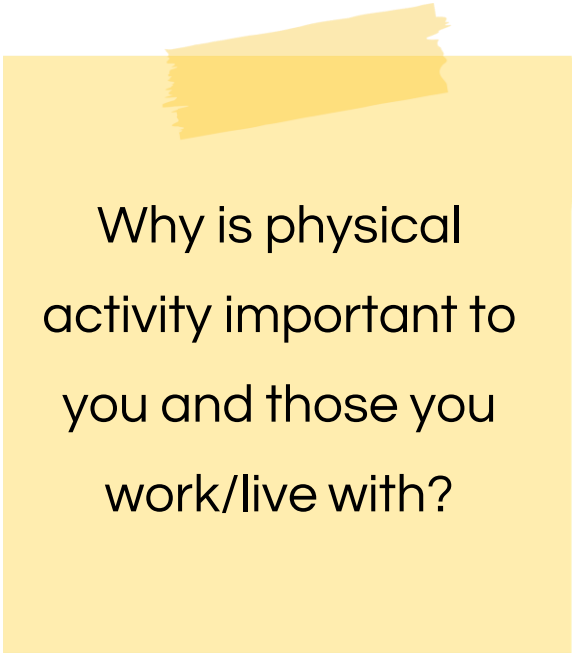


[Active Lives Children and Young People Survey - Academic year 2023-24](#)

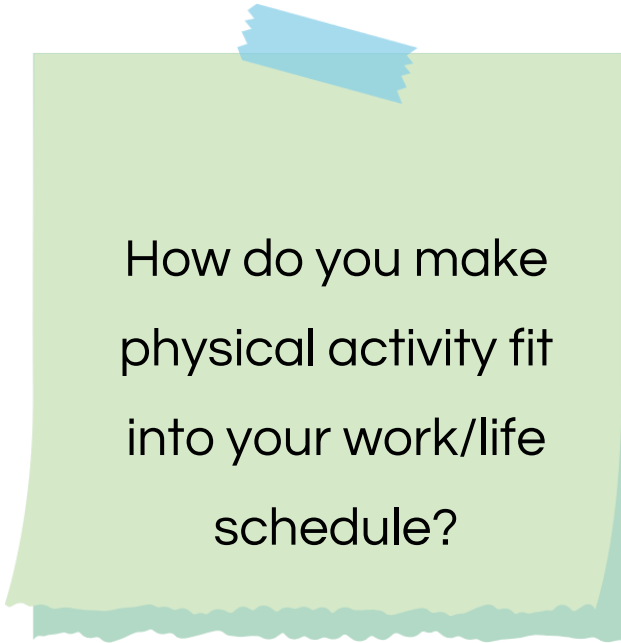
# Why physical activity matters



In one word, how does physical activity make you feel?



Why is physical activity important to you and those you work/live with?



How do you make physical activity fit into your work/life schedule?

- Contributes to holistic development: physical, emotional, and cognitive
- Supports overall wellbeing and stress reduction
- Enhances focus, attention, and classroom engagement
- Builds healthy habits that carry into adulthood

# Understanding resilience in Young People

What is resilience?

**“The ability to be happy, successful, etc again after something difficult or bad has happened.”**

[RESILIENCE | English meaning - Cambridge Dictionary](#)

For young people, this means being able to **bounce back from challenges**, maintain a sense of hope, and develop coping strategies that help them thrive in changing or stressful situations. It's not about avoiding problems but about **responding positively and learning from them**.

Think of a time you  
overcame a  
challenge.  
*What helped you  
bounce back?*

# Understanding resilience in Young People

## Adaptability

*Tries new activities and adjusts to changes without giving up.*

## Emotional Regulation

*Uses calming strategies like breathing or mindfulness.*

## Positive Risk-Taking

*Explores new environments and takes safe chances.*

## Social Connection

*Builds friendships and works well in teams.*

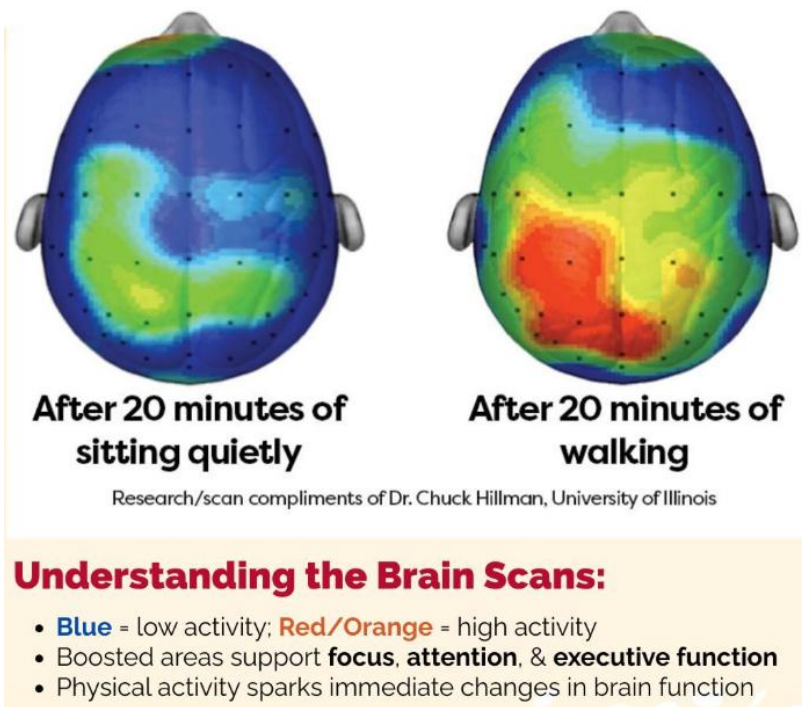
## Healthy Habits

*Engages in regular physical activity and self-care.*



- Resilience = the ability to adapt, recover, and grow from challenges
- Essential to support academic success and personal wellbeing
- Strengthened through real experiences, not just instruction
- Develops gradually through repeated opportunities to cope and overcome

# The Mind–Body connection



## Professor Chuck Hillman's Brain Scan Findings (2007)

- Brain scans show stark contrast: sitting quietly vs. 20 minutes of walking.  
**Blue** = low brain activity; **red/orange** = higher activity.
- After walking, brain activity spikes in areas for **focus, memory, and executive function**.
- Movement isn't just "time to burn energy off"- it **prepares the brain for learning**.
- Physical activity boosts cognitive performance **almost immediately**.
- Children perform better on **attention and memory tasks** right after moving.
- Just **20 minutes of walking improves focus and self-regulation**.

- Movement stimulates brain function and cognitive processing
- Physical activity increases endorphins and can aid positive moods
- Improves emotional regulation and reduces anxiety
- Supports executive functioning: planning, decision-making, self-control

# How movement builds emotional resilience

## Emotional Resilience Benefits

Physical activity enhances the ability to adapt and recover from stress and adversity in young people.

## Mood Enhancement and Stress Reduction

Exercise stimulates endorphin release and reduces cortisol, promoting better mood and lower stress.

## Social Interaction and Confidence

Team sports and group activities foster social skills, confidence, and support mental well-being.

## Lifelong Healthy Habits

Regular physical activity develops coping mechanisms that support long-term mental health resilience.

### Aerobic Exercise

Cardiovascular Health Benefits  
Endorphin Release and Mood Boost  
Sleep and Energy Regulation  
Building Discipline and Perseverance

### Team Sports

Promotes Social Connections  
Builds Emotional Resilience  
Teaches Adaptability

### Yoga

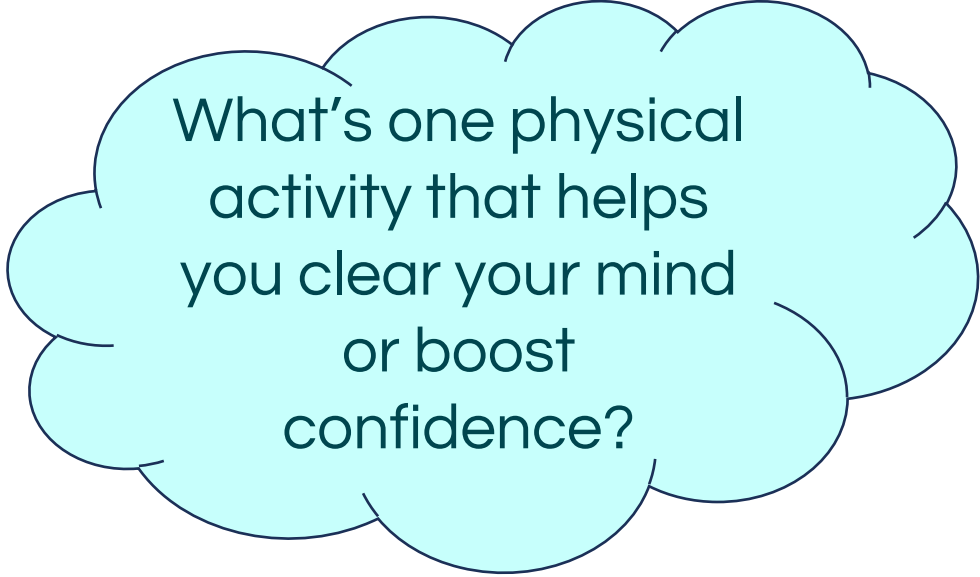
Mindfulness and Emotional Resilience  
Physical Health Benefits  
Stress Management Strategies

### Mindfulness Practices

Emotional Resilience Benefits  
Mindfulness Techniques  
Mindfulness for Children  
Complementary Physical Activities



# How movement builds emotional resilience



What's one physical activity that helps you clear your mind or boost confidence?

- Encourages persistence and self-belief through practice and improvement
- Helps students understand failure as part of learning
- Builds confidence through skill mastery and achievement
- Enables expression and release of emotional tension

# Learning through challenge and setbacks

Sport and physical activity tasks provide safe, real-time difficulty

Students learn to problem-solve, adjust strategy, and try again

What does physical activity do for resilience in young people?

Teaches perseverance and coping with frustration

Offers opportunities to celebrate effort, not just outcomes

# Active play as a tool for growth



- Play fosters creativity, curiosity, and intrinsic motivation
- Reduces pressure and creates joy in learning
- Builds risk-taking, independence, and decision-making
- Encourages inclusive participation for all ability levels



# The role of teamwork and social connection



- Promotes communication, trust, and collaboration
- Encourages empathy and understanding different perspectives
- Strengthens sense of belonging and community
- Supports leadership development and peer support networks

# Integrating movement into everyday learning

Embedding activity into lessons makes resilience-building part of daily life. Movement breaks improve focus, while active learning fosters **engagement, adaptability, and problem-solving skills**. This integration ensures resilience is developed consistently across the school day.



# Integrating movement into everyday learning

If you had no chairs in the room, how would you run your lesson or meeting?

How might movement help students remember key ideas better?

Share one way that you could add movement into a lesson or meeting.



- Using brain breaks and classroom movement activities
- Planning for Outdoor learning and practical, hands-on tasks
- Embedding physical activity into the curriculum (e.g., active maths or literacy)
- Providing choice and variety to engage different learners

# Empowering resilient, well-rounded learners



- Students equipped with lifelong coping and problem-solving skills
- Confident, self-aware young people ready for real-world challenges
- Physical activity as a foundation for wellbeing and academic success
- A learning community that values growth, balance, and strength

# Contact

Rob Whalen – Partnership Officer – Education and CYP  
Active Norfolk

[robert.whelen@activenorfolk.org](mailto:robert.whelen@activenorfolk.org)



**Please provide  
some feedback**

