Physical activity critical for children's quality of life (Parent version)

One thing that most families learn at some point – particularly during the COVID lockdown – is that balancing a child's screen time with physical activity is not easy.

The latest National Child Health Poll in Australia showed that the No. 1 health concern for parents in 2021 is 'Excessive screen time'. The No. 7 of parents' top ten concerns was 'Not enough exercise'.

SHOULD SCREEN TIME BE THE NO. 1 CONCERN?

This research looks at the relationship between how children use their time and their wellbeing using a nationally-representative data called the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) and finds that:

- Children who met the 24-hour movement guidelines had better quality of life

- Physical activity was most important to children's quality of life

- The relationship between physical activity and quality of life was even stronger when families came from more difficult circumstances

The research thus suggests that physical activity is more important for children's health-related quality of life than recreational screen time use.

Parenting is hard and it might seem difficult to encourage children equally in all aspects of the 24-hour movement guidelines. If parents wanted to focus on a top priority, encouraging physical activity might be the best way and it might also have the added bonus of reducing children's recreational screen time and improving their sleep.

Many countries around the world including Australia, have introduced 24-hour movement guidelines for children including recommendations about the healthiest mix of physical activity, screen time and sleep. The guidelines tell us the recommended time a child should spend in each activity per day.

AUSTRALIAN TIME USE GUIDELINES AGE 5-17 YEARS

SLEEP	PHYSICAL ACTIVITY	RECREATIONAL SCREEN TIME
5-17 years: 9-11 hours/ night 14-17 years: 8-10 hours/ night	60 minutes or more The more you huff & puff the better	No more than 2 hours/day