

A photograph of three children walking up a set of stairs. The child in the foreground is a girl with blonde hair in a ponytail, wearing a blue backpack with a yellow sun sticker. Behind her is a boy with blonde hair, also wearing a blue backpack. To the left, another child is partially visible. They are all wearing white t-shirts. The stairs are made of concrete and have a metal railing. The background shows a building with large windows.

Vantaa

Committing to a hobby – and being a hobbyist's parent

Sports afternoon pilot 2025–2026

Heittäydy harrastukseen "Dive into a hobby" project

A decorative, light green swirl graphic that starts from the bottom right and curves upwards and to the left, ending near the text "Dive into a hobby" project.

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Sanna Heikkilä, Urban Culture and Wellbeing Department / Sports Services /
Finnish Model for Leisure Activities development project

Photo
City of Vantaa / Sami Lievonen

Committing to a hobby

Practicing sports as a hobby means that a child is physically active and exercises regularly every week. A sports hobby can be either guided or independent, but it is often easiest to learn diverse skills through guided hobbies.

An example of a guided sports hobby

- Recurrent activities 1–3 times a week
- outside of school, that is, *leisure-time* activities, which participants enroll in separately.
- *practices* are always held at the same time, for example, Mondays at 16–17
- *guided*, meaning that the activities involve a competent adult, that is, an instructor, who provides guidance and help
- often subject to a fee, but there are also free hobbies available.

Why participate in physical activity?

Regular hobbies help develop self-regulation skills and the skills for taking care of oneself. Sufficient physical activity and heavy exercise prevent melancholy and depression and promote higher-quality sleep. Best of all, regular and sufficient heavy physical activity also promotes coping in school and intelligence! Yes, you read that right! Physical activity really promotes intelligence.

How does this guide help?

The first months of a hobby are crucial. They determine whether a hobby will become a permanent part of daily life. There are especially many challenges in hobbies that start in the fall. The evenings grow darker and the weather becomes colder, which means reduced physical activity outdoors and increased passiveness and screen time.

On the other hand, there is a lot to learn when joining a new sport group, such as getting to know the group, sport and instructor, as well as learning how to engage in shared activities. Tardiness, absences, temporary lack of interest, tiredness and forgetting one's sports gear are all possible risk factors that can end an interesting hobby early on.

It is good to receive a reminder, from time to time and when problems arise, about why having a hobby is worthwhile, what its goals are and how a parent can support their child in being active. This guide aims to provide support for the child's hobby.

Why is exercise good for you?

Physical activity and exercise can mean, for example, playing, outdoor activities, biking or soccer. It is important and beneficial in many ways!

Physical activity makes the body stronger

- The muscles and bones become stronger.
- You will have more energy throughout the day.
- You will sleep better at night.

Exercise is good for your mood

- Physical activity often makes you feel good.
- Exercising can help you feel better if you are sad or anxious.
- When you exercise, the body produces “feel-good chemicals”, that is, endorphins.

Exercise helps you learn

- After exercising, it may be easier to focus at school.
- The brain likes it when the body moves!

You can have fun with friends when exercising

- You can make new friends or spend time with friends.
- Playing, games and teams teach you to work together.

Exercise can also be an adventure

- New places, tricks and skills!
- You can find your own favorite sport.

How does exercise also help in the future?

Exercise is not just some passing fun, it also prepares you for the future – exercise is also beneficial when growing up, as an adult and in working life. Here are some reasons why exercising regularly now is a good idea:

The body stays healthy longer

- When you are already physically active as a child, your body will become stronger and healthier.
- It is easier for good habits/routines to become part of life.
- You will get sick less as an adult and have more energy at work and during your leisure time.

Exercise strengthens the mind, meaning that

- you will learn to process disappointment and difficult feelings.
- exercise reduces stress and helps you to deal with it.
- you will learn to believe in yourself and try again after failing.

Exercise teaches valuable skills

- Cooperation: playing in a team teaches you how to work together.
- Fair play: you learn to follow the rules and how to be a good friend.
- Perseverance: you learn to try and practice for a long time.

These skills are very useful in school, work and everywhere else in life!

Exercise creates a good rhythm for life

- Going to practice teaches time management.
- Learning how to plan your time: when to go to practice, eat a snack and do homework.
- You will also need to know how to schedule things and keep promises in working life.

Exercise can help you find your own thing

- Some may become interested in the sports sector and turn it into a career.

- Or you may learn what you really enjoy doing – and what you don't.

Being a hobbyist's parent

Reasons why physical activity is important for your child

In Finland, it is very common for children and the young to participate in guided exercise after school. This can mean soccer, swimming, dancing, or gymnastics, for example.

Physical activity is important for all children – girls and boys alike. Here are some reasons why physical activity is good for your child:

Exercise makes your child healthier

- Your child will have a stronger body and better immune system.
- Your child will get sick less and have more energy for school.
- Your child will sleep better at night and wake up refreshed.

Exercise is good for the mood

- A physically active child will usually become happier.
- Exercise helps if the child is anxious or sad.

Exercise helps your child integrate into a new residential area.

- Your child will find new friends through the hobby.
- Your child will learn Finnish, if it is not their native language.
- Your child will feel like part of the group and society.

Your child will learn important skills

- Your child will learn how to work together with others.
- Your child will learn skills related to hobbies.
- Your child will learn to listen to instructions, try and improve.
- These skills will help in school and in the future.

What happens if your child is always at home after school?

- Your child may start to feel lonely.
- Too much screen time (phone, computer) is not good.
- It may be harder to make friends and learn the language.

As a parent, this is how you can support your child:

- Ask what kind of exercise your child is interested in.
- Take your child to try out different sports – many places will let you try out a sport for free.
- You can also ask the school or nurse for help.



Photo 1 City of Vantaa / Creative Day

How to tell if your child is not physically active enough

In Finland, every child has the right to physical activity – girls and boys are both allowed to be strong, happy and active.

Physical activity is important for a child's development, health and mind. If your child is not physically active enough, their coping, that is, ability to function may be weakened.

Here are some signs that you may observe:

Your child is often tired

- Your child often says: "I can't" or "I'm tired".
- Even though your child sleeps, they are constantly exhausted.

Your child is constantly sitting or lying down

- Your child has a lot of screen time (phone, tablet, TV).
- Your child does not want to go outside or be active even for short periods of time.

Your child seems sad or irritated

- Your child does not get excited about things the way they used to.
- Even little things might make your child irritated or cry.



Photo 2 City of Vantaa / Kaisa Sunimento

School is going poorly

- Your child is unable to focus at school or on their homework.
- Your child leaves homework undone or forgets things.

Your child has no friends or is withdrawing from others

- Your child does not want to meet other children.
- Your child says: "I don't want to go anywhere".

Physical signs

- Headache, stomachache or muscle pain without a clear cause.
- Your child is easily winded even after small amounts of physical activity.

What can a parent do?

- Ask your child gently how they are feeling and what they would like to do.
- Encourage light physical activity – such as going on a walk together.
- Contact the teacher, school nurse or student advisor if you have concerns.
- Remember: every small step is a good step. Your support is important for your child.

What should a parent do if problems arise in a hobby?

Hobbies and physical activity are a normal part of children's everyday lives. It is important for a child to find their own way of exercising. Parents and guardians also act as role models and examples for a child.

Starting a new hobby may come with challenges. The first two months are often crucial for the continuation of a hobby. Stress, friends' other activities and changes in mood can impact whether a child continues a hobby.

Fall may bring more challenges: it is cold and dark outside, children spend more time indoors and with their phones and other devices. Insufficient sleep can impact coping and enthusiasm for continuing a hobby.



Photo 3 City of Vantaa / adapted Sakari Manninen

A new hobby may seem exciting and fun at first. But as time passes and the feeling of novelty fades, conflicts may occur. As the children get to know each other and become brave enough to voice their opinions, disputes may arise. The things that need to be learned for a hobby may also not reflect the child's preferences and wishes at the time.

From an upbringing perspective, resolving conflicts and disputes are important situations for children to practice interpersonal skills with the support of adults. However, the child usually does not see the situation that way, or it may feel bad in the moment. Children learn important skills for everyday life through interactions with each other.

The child may actually want to take part in a hobby, but difficulties in regulating their own emotions in different situations may pose a challenge. These skills improve with practice, and the hobby may then become a permanent part of everyday life. The development of emotional regulation can help the child achieve goals later in life as well.



Photo 4 City of Vantaa / Loc Nguyen

Talk with your child

It is a parent's job to support their child and help them overcome the initial challenges of starting a hobby together with other adults, such as the hobby's instructor. Discussion is an important way to address feelings and conflicts. When having a discussion, it is good to pay attention to what part of the hobby your child is enthusiastic about.

- Which parts of the hobby make the child happy?
- And which parts are irritating?
- Is some part of the hobby too easy or too difficult? Why?
- What can be learned from the hobby, if given the chance?
- Which parts of engaging in the hobby cause concern?

It is important to discuss the child's thoughts with the hobby instructor as well, as then you can consider if something in the hobby could be done differently. It is a good idea for the parent and child to think about both the present day as well as what is best for the child with regard to their future skills and areas of interest. Sometimes the benefits of a hobby cannot be seen until later. The parent must try to find a suitable balance between support, understanding and encouraging.



Photo 5 City of Vantaa / Creative Day

What to say when your child's motivation starts to fade?

1. A child cannot yet see the long-term benefits – an adult can see them best

Children act on the basis of what feels good in the moment. They may be nervous about starting a new hobby or become bored quickly.

→ "You might not understand why this is important right now – but as a parent, I do, and that's enough."

2. Having a hobby supports the child's growth and development – physical activity and exercise is part of leisure time, and it is not a matter of negotiation

According to studies, practicing a sport in a group supports a child's social skills, self-confidence, ability to focus and emotional skills.

→ "The first few times aren't enough to see everything fun about a hobby. You will only really see what is fun and what isn't after going several times."

→ "At first, it might feel like something is boring or hard, but you will learn more about it when you continue the hobby a little longer. Only then will you really know if you like it or not."

→ See the "Talk with your child" questions (previous page)



Photo 6 City of Vantaa / Creative Day

3. Commitment teaches vital life skills

A regular hobby develops persistence, time management and perseverance – skills that are not learned in school alone.

→ "We have committed to this hobby for this season, so we will continue until the end of the season. After the season, you can make a new decision about continuing or quitting. You don't need to love the sport right now, but you need to try."

→ See the "Talk with your child" questions

4. Hobbies enable experiences of success – not just performance

Many children get a feeling of being good at something from their hobby. This feeling does not occur immediately; it takes time and effort.

→ "It is important to experience what it's like to learn something difficult. That's why we're supporting you to continue."

5. The adult provides a direction – the child can travel freely within it

The parent's job is not to ask whether their child wants to continue every week – it is to help the child find meaning in the activity.

→ "The hobby includes rules, schedules and instruction, which you may not always like – that is normal. Life is like that too. These do not make the hobby bad."

General notes

With the development of the child's self-regulation in mind, the parent sets boundaries for the child, but also takes the child's opinions into account. The adult knows that exercise is good for the child, and thus they should guide the child toward decisions that are meaningful for the child's wellbeing, that is, ensure that the child is physically active enough in everyday life.

Physical activity in everyday life is not a choice – but the form it takes very well can be. In this, the adult listens to the child and strives to enable the form of exercise that the child would like to practice in accordance with their interests. The child can be supported through, for example, taking them into account and praising them for good behavior. The *authoritative* parenting style listens and sets boundaries, which supports the development of self-regulation skills.



Photo 7 City of Vantaa / Creative Day

What kind of parenting should be avoided if you want to support your child's self-regulation skills? If an adult thinks that the child must obey the parent's rules without question, does not explain why the child should behave in a certain way and does not take into account the child's feelings or opinions, the parenting style is *authoritarian*, and it does not support the development of self-regulation skills in the same way as authoritative parenting, which listens and sets boundaries.

Authoritative and authoritarian parenting therefore mean different things. Authoritative parenting combines clear boundaries with warmth and support. Authoritarian parenting focuses on control and obedience.

Questions and topics for parents to reflect on

Attitude toward own exercise and hobbies

- What were the attitudes towards exercise like when I was a child?
- What kinds of feelings do exercise and hobbies awaken in me?
- Do I practice sports in some form?
- Would I like to practice sports in some form?

Attitudes toward a child's hobbies

- How do I feel about my child practicing sports?
- What kind of exercise do I think my child should engage in?
- Do my attitudes toward the hobbies of boys and girls differ?

Reflect on why you answered these three questions the way you did.

Practicing sports in an association: Do I know...

- ...or can I explain in my own words what a sports club or association is?
- ...what membership in a sports club or association means?
- ...how to start a hobby?
- ...what to do if I want to quit a hobby?
- ...what membership and season fees are?
- ...what a competition license is?

Supporting self-regulation

- Do I know why it is important for a child to have a regular hobby?
- Do I know why a low-sugar snack can be important before practice?
- Do I know why it is good to experience a broad range of emotions in a hobby, such as joy, disappointment, teamwork, conflicts, challenges and successes together with others?

Lack of exercise is bad for coping

Technology has changed our daily lives significantly, and there is little need to move around the home anymore. It is now possible to buy food, keep in contact with friends, study and work, all from the comfort of the couch.

According to the 2024 national Move! measurement (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2024), young girls living in Vantaa were among the most out-of-shape in all of Finland. Many young girls feel anxious and that their ability to cope is weak. Many do not get enough exercise, as digital devices compete for leisure time. Physical activity, which has been shown to reduce anxiety (Hansen 2023), may not always be recognized as useful.

Children's lives are often fast paced nowadays. Many want to have easily approachable experiences, while committing to long-term activities may be challenging. However, it has long been known that "things that are easily learned are often unnecessary and things that are difficult to learn are necessary". For example, it is easy to learn how to use a phone, but adopting physical activity as part of one's everyday life requires perseverance and goals.

A child might not yet have this understanding, but a parent does. This is why it is important to support the child and help guide them toward a good and well-balanced life.



Photo 8 City of Vantaa / Sakari Manninen

Sports clubs and associations

Participating in sports through a sports club or association is a common form of leisure activity in Finland. Sports associations are an excellent growth environment for children. If the parents have no experience with sports associations, the term *sports association* or *sports club* may be foreign and unclear. The meaning of *hobby* and *sports hobby* may also be unclear, in which case the idea of a “*long-term sports hobby in a sports club or association*” may sound downright utopian. What do these terms mean?

Sports clubs and associations are an important part of Finnish society. Above all else, those who participate in sports association activities are united by their enthusiasm for sports and physical activity and for learning new skills. Sports associations offer children the opportunity to grow, participate and belong to a physically active community, where they can learn useful skills for everyday life.

The parents’ attitudes greatly impact whether a child will start a hobby. The child’s enthusiasm alone is often not enough. Even if the child can speak Finnish and is very familiar with what sports clubs and associations have to offer, they may not be able to tell their parents about the hobby opportunities.

For some parents, a child’s interest in Finnish culture may feel like a threat. For example, some parents are afraid that the family’s connection will weaken if their child becomes “too Finnish” (e.g. *Helsingin Sanomat* article from February 13, 2025: *Somaliäitejä ahdistaa omien lasten suomalaistuminen*; “Somali mothers are worried about their children becoming Finnish” [in Finnish]). This may result from parents not being familiar enough with the forms of activity, in which case a genuine discussion with the families about all of the skills a sports hobby can teach with regard to life, working life and everyday life is necessary. It would be good for parents to have the opportunity to see what practicing sports really looks like and hear about examples of successful experiences (e.g. *Yle* November 1, 2025: *Takwa Adam ei lapsena nähnyt muita huivia käyttäviä urheilija-tyttöjä – nyt hän kannustaa muita kentälle*; “Takwa Adam did not see other girls wearing headscarves in sports when she was a child – now she encourages others to join in” [in Finnish]).

Schools, sports clubs and associations and parents can work together to help children learn healthy lifestyle habits.

To join a sports club or sports association?

Text: Juulia Salomaa, Athletics House for Everyone Project (TALO project),
Vantaan Salamat & Finnish Athletics Federation

What does having a hobby mean?

A hobby is a regular leisure-time activity that brings joy to everyday life and supports wellbeing. A sports hobby can be soccer, swimming, track and field, dance, or any other sport. In a hobby, you can learn new skills, meet new people and spend time together with others.

A hobby can help children and young people to find their own strengths, make friends and experience the joy of success. In hobbies, participants also practice working together, following rules and taking others into account. Regular exercise supports physical and mental wellbeing and helps with coping at school and in everyday life.

For many hobbies, it is possible to join without previous experience. The most important thing is an interest in trying and participating. It is often possible to use the first few sessions to learn about the activity before deciding to start the hobby.

What is a sports club?

A sports club is an organization that organizes sports hobbies for children, young people and adults. The club offers instruction, practice and opportunities to participate in games and events. In clubs, you can practice sports for your own enjoyment without any previous experience or practice more seriously and take part in competitions. There are several sports clubs in Vantaa.



Photo 9 Vantaan Salamat / Tim Husa

Sports club activities are guided by coaches and instructors, who take care of training and ensure a safe atmosphere. Practices are usually arranged every week, and during these sessions, participants learn to play the sport according to age and skill level.

Club activities also often include shared events, trips, games and competitions. A hobby can be a good way for the entire family to get to know new people and Finnish hobby culture. Parents can participate in the activities by encouraging their child, taking them to practice or helping out at events, for example.

Why join a sports club?

- ✓ Professional instructors
- ✓ Opportunity for a long-term hobby
- ✓ Regular practices
- ✓ Opportunity to improve and compete

How to enroll in a hobby?

You can contact the sports club or association by phone or email. Most associations have a website with a registration form for their groups. Many places will let you try the sport for free, so do not hesitate to do so! You can participate in a hobby even if you do not speak Finnish. You do not need any special equipment when starting a hobby. You often need to bring sportswear, sneakers and a water bottle to practice.

If you do not know which hobby would be suitable for a child or young person, you can ask the club or association for advice or try out different sports together. Clubs and associations are happy to help in starting a new hobby and will tell you about practice schedules, fees and necessary equipment.



Photo 10 Vantaan Salamat / Tim Husa

It is a good idea to come to practice on time. You can tell the instructor if your child needs help with the language, for example, or if you have any concerns about the hobby. Many groups have children and families who speak different languages.

What fees can a hobby include?

When you join a sports club in Finland, there are usually some fees you need to pay. General fees are the membership fee and practice fee (also known as the season fee). You can take out insurance in case of accidents. If the hobby includes participation in competition events, these usually include separate competition fees and the purchase of a competition license.

What is an association membership fee?

All members of the club or association pay a membership fee. With the membership fees, the association can organize high-quality and safe hobby activities. It supports the activities of the association, such as coaching, event organization and maintaining sports facilities. The membership fee enables participation in the association's activities and grants the right to represent the association in competitions. Membership may also include benefits, such as discounts from partners.

Why is insurance necessary?

There is always a small risk of injury in sports. This is why it is important to have valid accident insurance. Some associations offer insurance to their members in connection with the membership fee. In some cases, you will need to acquire the insurance yourself. The insurance ensures that you will receive the necessary care without additional costs in the event of an accident. The insurance will give peace of mind to both the hobbyist and their family. If something is unclear, please contact the sports club or association.



Photo 11 City of Vantaa / Sami Lievonen

Hobbies cost money – support is available!

Sports hobbies often involve a monthly fee. Some sports also require equipment. The costs of the hobby cover, for example, the fees of the instructors and coaches, sports facility rental fees and the costs of the equipment and gear. Do not hesitate to ask the school, association or the city's Sports Services about different forms of support.



Photo 12 WordArt

There are many ways to receive financial support:

- The city's hobby support **Hobby Support for Children and Youth | Vantaa**
- Organizations such as SOS Children's Villages Finland **www.unelmista.fi** and Hope ry **www.hopeyhdistys.fi** offer support for families with limited means.
- Associations' own support funds – many associations can help with costs.
- Many parties also organize free hobbies, e.g. Vantaa of Many Hobbies (the Finnish Model for Leisure Activities).

The parents' responsibilities in a child's hobby

Encourage and support. Parents and loved ones can encourage the child so that the hobby will feel good for them.

Help out with association activities. Parents can help with transportation, volunteer tasks or events, for example. Take care of the schedule. Parents can remind their children of practice times and help them get there on time.

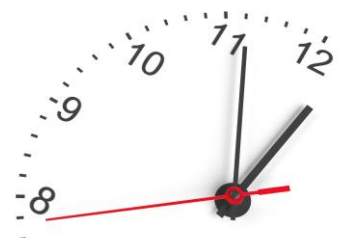


Photo 13 WordArt

Some sports clubs and sports associations in West Vantaa:

**Etelä-Vantaan taitoluistelijat (figure skating)
Etelä-Vantaan Urheilijat (ice hockey)
IF Helsingin Atlas (handball)
Keimolan Kaiku (soccer)
**Kiekko-Vantaa (ice hockey)
M-team (floorball)
Myyr Squash (squash)
PK-35 (soccer)
**PuHu juniorit (basketball)
Ringette Walapais (ringette)
**SB Vantaa (floorball)
Seirenkai (karate + jujutsu)
**Simmis Vanda (swimming)
Sporttia Kaikille ry (diverse hobby activities)
Sukellusseura Hydromania (diving, underwater rugby)
**Triathlon Vantaa (triathlon)
Uimahyppyseura Vantaa Diving (diving)
Vanders (swimming)
Vatado (Taekwondo)
Vantaa Hockey Club (field hockey)
**Vantaan Jalkapalloseura VJS (soccer)
Vantaan Jukara (judo + aikido + karate)
Vantaan Lentopallo (volleyball)
Vantaan Pyörre (synchronized swimming)
Vantaan Sampo (wrestling)
**Vantaan Salamat (track and field)
Vantaan TAFT (American football)
**Vantaan Voimisteluseura (gymnastics)
Vantaan katutanssiyhdistys (dance)
Vantaa Dance Institute (dance)
Variston Tennis (tennis)

***The club has been granted Tähtiseura status by the Finnish Olympic Committee, ensuring quality*

You can find further information about hobby opportunities and inspiration in
Vantaa's hobby calendar: harrastukset.vantaa.fi

**Welcome to exercise, learn and enjoy each other's
company!**

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