

## Transcript

MODULE 3: Experts presentation – Bringing back the chance to play and be active for children and youth

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Gregor Starc: Hello, everybody. My name is Gregor Starc, and coming from University of Ljubljana Faculty of Sport. And I'm the manager of the Slovenian National Surveillance System for Children's Somatic and Motor Development.

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Gregor Starc: Today, I'm going to shortly talk about how to fit Health-Enhancing Physical Activity and Physical Literacy in the backpack of early age education.

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Gregor Starc: You know that physical literacy is becoming growingly important in current populations because basically we lost our touch with nature and also with who we are or who we were as people.

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Gregor Starc: Children today obtain physical literacy in many different ways, but they obtain it in informal learning and in formal learning. Informal learning is at home with friends and formal learning is in schools, sport clubs, etc. So we've been working with physical literacy for quite some time in our national settings in Slovenia, and we know that physical literacy is one of the prerequisites of active life in adulthood. Because if you are physically literate, then you have ability to choose any sport, any activity you want as adult to be your leisure time, physical activity and an important part of your daily life.

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Gregor Starc: So if we look at the differences between obtaining physical literacy in schools or in informal settings, then there are some differences. For example, in school, everything has to be purposeful. So you have to have goals, you have to have goals you want to achieve. Then you have to choose the contents with which you achieve this goal. So purposeful. It has to be professionally guided. Not everybody has access to school, so only professionals can work with children for, for example, physical education teachers or classroom teachers who have some competencies also in teaching physical education. So it has to be professionally guided, it has to be planned. So you have to know how to reach the goal. You have to plan the steps. It has to be safe. Of course, in schools, you cannot jeopardise children's health. So you don't want to risk anything because if a child gets injured during classes, then you might have a problem with parents, of course, also in school or in training, the physical activity itself has to be sufficiently intensive. So you have to provide children with the opportunity to be intensively active, not just moderately or low active. It also has to be varied. So you have to have very many different types of physical activity because you don't want children to be bored. So they need first varied activities not to be bored. And second, they need to have varied physical activities because if you have a lot of information, a lot of motor information, a lot of motor programs in your brain, then you can transfer these programs in any learning of any new thing in sports.

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Gregor Starc: So this is formal learning in schools, but at home, among friends, it's a bit different. At home we have to assure that the physical activity of a child is regular. So in school, you don't need to worry about that because you have a schedule. At home, you don't, so you have to take care of that. Uh, you can see it's risky up here. So at home, it's a bit different. At home we have the opportunity or the or children have the opportunity to also play risky games. So the games in which they might get injured if they don't respect the play or the tree they are climbing on or the danger they are in. So this is something that they have to learn during childhood. Physical activity at home is also spontaneous, so children are not guided to do it. They



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simply want to play go out and play with friends. It has to be frequent enough. This might be a problem at home because parents often cannot assure that a child is frequently enough physically active or regularly physically active. So this is something parents have to think about.

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Gregor Starc: With both the formal learning and informal learning, children gain information, gain skills which they can use to learn. In schools, they learn sports. They learn the techniques, the tactics. They learn about what a certain movement does for them, for their health. And this means raising their physical literacy. But we do need also the informal learning, the informal settings, because in those settings during leisure time, children can then practice what they learned in school. And this is how physical literacy is embedded in the knowledge.

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Gregor Starc: We know that children's environment is challenged so they don't have as many opportunities for play or for outdoor play, for example, as they used to have. This is some research I'm doing with my students at a faculty of sport in Ljubljana. And every student has to find one family that has at least three generations. So a child that's around 11 years old, a parent, parents, grandparents or and great grandparents, if possible. So what they do, they gather the entire family, different generations. They take Google Maps and they talk about their childhood and about the environment they lived in. How did they play outdoors and also how far from home did they play independently without the knowledge of their parents? And we observe how this space shrank from generation to generation. For example, here you can see grandfathers and grandmothers having approximately the same roaming distance from home. So their lifestyles were very similar. There were no computers, no television, no electronic devices, nothing that would keep them sedentary except maybe books who liked books. So you can see that the roaming space of great grandparents and grandparents is similar more than five kilometres on average from home without the knowledge of the parents without control of the parents. Then came younger generations. So today's parents it's. It's my generation. A bit older or a bit younger, but people who have children at the moment. So our free roaming distance from home shrank from five kilometres to three kilometres already. So there was a huge drop in our space in which we could use for play. And then when we come to today's children, you can see that the roaming space is around one kilometre. And something girls have a bit bigger, a bit longer distance from home than boys, which is interesting. But still you can see this enormous shrinking of their habitual space, which they could use in their everyday life for the play.

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Gregor Starc: And now remember the previous slide when we had school, a formal arena or an informal one. And then think about. Why? What would happen if we didn't have any text? In our world. Would it make sense to teach children how to read and write? There would be nothing to read and write. So this is what's happening. The possibility for play is disappearing and we can ask, okay, does it still make sense to teach physical literacy in schools? Yes, of course it is. But we haven't done much to help children so far.

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Gregor Starc: So what happened to their environment is. Their lifestyles changed because the environment changed. Before, a lot of children were playing outside with the friends, so they had peer play. Now you can see that peer play started disappearing. It's it has almost disappeared in many settings. So now we have individual play. You can see children sitting one by another, but having each one's own phone. So they basically don't play among themselves. It's not peer play, it's individual play. Everybody plays within the own device. And this is something that prevents them to build good relationships, to develop also in social sense. So we in this way rob them of their ability to have peer play as an important part of their life.



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Gregor Starc: In the past, we had playful streets. Children were playing outside. On the streets in the natural settings, it was theirs. Today, it's not anymore. The playful streets turned into park streets. We had a lot of costs everywhere. Even if they're not driving, they're parked there. So they take up the space. Children would have to compete with cars for the space. And we certainly have to do something about it. Outdoor play was also replaced by indoor play. Children used to play outdoor more. Now many of them only play inside, even if the parents take them somewhere to play. It's very often a gym or something else. So they are still indoors and that's why they can't experience the surroundings they live in. They don't know the surroundings they live in. You saw that the roaming space is one kilometre around the house. So if this child gets out of the car two kilometres from the house, the child can be lost. I mean, he couldn't find his way home. And this is why it's so important to start thinking about regaining children's environment again, to reset everything, to get this environment back, to give children an opportunity to play in their home settings, to play on the streets, to play in nature, to play outdoors, and of course, to play independently.

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Gregor Starc: A lot of parents think that taking a child to a park, sitting there and watching a child play and, I don't know, protecting the child, that this is something that is optimal. No, it's not. This is supervised play. The supervised play means somebody else is taking responsibility from children. So the parents are, and in this way, we are raising dependent children, which we don't want. We need independent people in all regards, in regards of their thinking and in regards of their functioning in society.

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Gregor Starc: So we have a lot of challenges and when we are thinking about all the projects, interventions, anything that we do to help children we have to think about. Their environment as well. We have to think about how to provide the environment in which children can build their physical literacy, in the environment in which they can use their physical literacy. Because you can learn a lot about what movement does to your body, what good it does to your body. You can know everything, but if you don't practice it, it doesn't mean anything. It's empty literacy. So we have to do something about it. We have to try to reset things to start changing environment. This means in urban planning. This means in people's mindset. Also, fear of parents is an obstacle, a serious obstacle. Parents today, they are afraid of many things. Some of them are potentially dangerous. So traffic for sure is bigger than it was ever in our history. So, yes, children have to learn how to live with cars, how to live with traffic, how to be safe in traffic. And they can only learn this by experiencing it. So this fear should also be taken as an opportunity to teach a child something.

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Gregor Starc: We have to acknowledge, finally, that physical literacy is one of the most important parts of child's literacy. And taking care of oneself is a prerequisite of quality life, of healthy lifestyle. You can have all kinds of literacies. You can have digital literacy. You can be literate in reading and writing. You can have mathematical literacy and everything. You can be literate on many levels. But without your hardware, which is your body, this means nothing because you are going to be at high risk of being ill or not feeling well. Living a low quality life, having high body mass, different problems connected to it, low physical fitness, unable to do many things in daily life. And this is why physical literacy should become one of the priorities in school settings and in informal settings.

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Gregor Starc: I wish you good work in all you do. And if there is anything you would like to talk about, ask about, here is also my address. And you are free and welcome to contact me. Thank you very much.



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