



## Answers to hard questions

- **I've seen kids playing in schoolyards on weekends – is it really a problem that kids don't have a place to play?**

Many schools in California are available to children after hours, but many are not. Some children have to jump the fence to be able to play on school grounds. Children should not have to scale fences for an opportunity to play and be healthy. Since our surroundings influence our health, our communities should be designed in ways that encourage physical activity. Children's health is compromised when they don't have safe places to play. It's only fair that that all children have the same opportunities to be active. If we use joint use partnerships to keep schoolyards open after hours, all children can have safe places to play.

- **Why don't parents just take their kids to the park?**

Many communities have safe parks close by, which makes it easier for everyone in the family to be healthy, but many don't. In fact, a lot of communities only have half the amount of open space recommended by the National Recreation and Park Association; some even have as little as one sixth the amount of recommended space. This means that some children can't play outdoors and don't get the exercise they need to be healthy. There's a smart way to fix this: Joint use agreements can open up school grounds on evenings and weekends so everyone has a chance to be active.

- **Don't kids get enough exercise in school?**

Unfortunately, research shows that many children do not get enough exercise in school. With an increasing emphasis on grades and test scores, it's not surprising that daily participation in physical education classes has been dropping. In fact, recent research revealed that more than half of school districts in California are not enforcing the minimum P.E. requirements for elementary school students.<sup>i</sup>

Allowing children to access schools after hours and on weekends will help their health and their study habits.<sup>ii, iii</sup> Additionally, children need ways to be active during the summer vacation, a time when research shows they gain weight more quickly.<sup>iv</sup> Joint use agreements would enable children all over the state to have the opportunities they need to be active and healthy. Making public spaces like schools accessible outside of school hours would not only benefit children – it would benefit all community members who want a place to be active – during the week, weekend and summer.

- **Why don't parents just watch their kids' diets?**

Of course what kids eat matters. But so does whether they move around or not. Parents and children are more likely to be healthy when their communities provide healthy food and safe places to play. Joint use agreements can provide a place in the community where everyone can be active together.

- **Does joint use cost anything?**

There are many different types of joint use agreements, and needs vary. But cities all over California have found ways to minimize costs, and in many cases, joint use costs have been less than expected. In Chula Vista, for example, a school and soccer league share a field, and hundreds of kids use the space for about \$10 per kid per year. Since physical activity is a key determinant of how healthy people are, smart schools and communities are working together to make costs manageable.

- **Why should schools open their gates and risk damage to their grounds and/or facilities?**

Groups seeking joint use agreements with schools and other facilities want to make sure the property is kept in good condition so that kids can continue to have a safe place to play and improve their chances of being healthy. Some school officials have even noticed a decrease in vandalism since implementing a joint use agreement. They have noted that when the community shares school resources, they take pride and ownership in the space, which can help deter vandalism. Joint use agreements can address liability and ensure that all parties are protected. In fact, most schools already have enough insurance to cover liability concerns.

- **Why do we need joint use agreements? Can't we just shake on it?**

Many joint use agreements are informal, but formal agreements allow protections for both the facility and the community group using the facility. Since school staffing can change over time, personal relationships are not the most secure way to guarantee access to facilities into the future. A formal agreement can address issues of cost, liability, maintenance and operations. Formal agreements are important because the community's health depends on the availability of safe places to be active.

*For more information on joint use, visit [www.jointuse.org](http://www.jointuse.org).*

*For more information on the joint use statewide task force, contact Manal Aboelata, Program Director for Prevention Institute ([www.preventioninstitute.org](http://www.preventioninstitute.org)), at 323-296-5750 or [manal@preventioninstitute.org](mailto:manal@preventioninstitute.org).*

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## References

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