



Charlie Golding with Marnie, 6, Eli, 3, Elsie, 1, and her book. Picture: ALEX COPPEL

The inside story of lockdown and kids

CHILDREN

SUSIE O'BRIEN

CHILDREN are staying up later, sleeping longer and spending more time on screens during the pandemic, studies show.

As schools reopen and restrictions on playgrounds and sports training ease, parents are being urged to keep kids active.

Children in many countries, including Australia, do not meet physical movement guidelines, according to research by Anthony Okely of Wollongong University and Chinese academic Hongyan Guan.

"Evidence shows that children are less active and more sedentary, with less consistent sleep patterns" on days when they are not at school, their paper in *The Lancet* says.

"Data from other high-income countries shows that



Charlie Golding's book for kids.

KEEP THEM ACTIVE

- WITH lockdown easing, it is important that children are active.
- THE best way is to spend time outdoors.
- TRY walking, cycling or scooting to and from the shops or park.
- VISIT playgrounds – which have now reopened – or take the dog for a walk.
- MAKE up active games

inside such as creating obstacle courses for kids to climb on.

- IF children are not usually active, start with low-intensity exercises and then build up.
- ENSURE that children have regular bed times and waking times.

Source: Professor Anthony Okely, WHO and UNICEF

compared with pre-COVID-19, during home restrictions, children spent more time using electronic media for entertainment, especially watching television," Prof Okely said.

"Children also spent less time playing outdoors and walking and cycling in their neighbourhood. Older children and adolescents were sleeping about the same

number of hours but were going to bed later and waking up later."

Google mobility data shows use of parks in Australia is down 30 per cent since parks reopened on May 26 compared with early January.

Prof Okely said extended time indoors can lead to vitamin D deficiency, mental health issues and myopia.

This means "benefits that

help children to cope with life-changing circumstances, such as the role of physical activity in resilience building, might be compromised," he said.

In addition, "children who are less active and engaged in more screen time are likely to have poorer sleep".

Attention is also turning to the emotional wellbeing of children, as organisations in-

cluding the Australian Institute of Family Studies and Telethon Kids Institute conduct surveys of parents.

Anne Hollonds, director of AIFS, said that while "some kids have had a fabulous time at home with their parents", others struggle with a lack of space at home, financial pressures and stressed parents.

Charlie Golding, mother of Marnie, 6, Eli, 3, and Elsie, 1, has written a book to help young children understand the coronavirus and lockdown restrictions.

"I didn't want to hide the virus from my children and couldn't find a resource to help them understand what's going on," the Melbourne mum said. "So I wrote this one that's visual and easy to read."

susan.obrien@news.com.au

Buy Golding's book at whenthe-world-went-insidebook.com

Parents can take part in the AIFS survey at fiassurveycovid19.com