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Put Your Best Foot Forward: A Model of Children's Active Travel

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Introduction: Children's engagement in adequate amounts of physical activity is important for their long-term health and wellbeing. Research has identified that children, particularly those in western countries, are currently not achieving the recommended amount of daily physical activity. It has been argued that a sustainable approach to ensuring this is attained is to support their involvement in incidental forms of physical activity such as active travel (AT), including walking or riding a bicycle to or from local destinations such as school or a park. Understanding how we can embed physical activity into children's everyday occupational roles is a way in which occupational therapists can contribute to this important health promotion agenda.

Objectives: The Model of Children's Active Travel (M-CAT) is proposed as a simple, coherent and comprehensive approach to the decision making processes influencing children's engagement in AT.

Description: The M-CAT is based on a systematic review of the literature. It incorporates the observable environment, parent perceptions and decisions regarding their child's AT, as well as the child's own perceptions and decisions regarding AT within his/her family contexts across time. Broadly it can be conceived as comprising: 1) objective elements of the child, parent/primary caregiver, family and environment, 2) perceptions of parents and children around these elements, and 3) outcomes.

Conclusion: The M-CAT highlights the complex and dynamic nature of factors impacting the decision-making process of the parent and child in relation to children's AT. It acknowledges the embeddedness of children in their families, whilst maintaining the importance of the child's own perceptions and decisions regarding his/her AT.

Contribution to the practice/evidence base of occupational therapy: Occupational therapists are increasingly focusing on health promotion through occupational engagement. AT is one way in which all children can become more physically active. The M-CAT offers a way forward for researchers to examine variables influencing AT in a systematic manner. Future testing of the M-CAT will consolidate understanding of the factors underlying the decision-making process which occurs within families in the context of their communities.