Move On: Reversing Children’s Sedentary Lifestyles
Part 1

Getting moving means not only increasing physical activity, but also reducing time spent in sedentary activities. A sedentary lifestyle is a leading cause of unhealthy children. Considering the amount of time children are spending in out-of-home care (such as preschool and child care), the early educator and the program play a key role in promoting physical activity and healthy lifestyles.

Let’s move on: Team up!

Research shows that children need to make connections to healthy lifestyles from multiple sources in their lives. Help children “move on” toward active lifestyles by making connections:

Parents – Find out what parents want for their children in regards to physical activity. Know the health history of their child and concerns or suggestions they have for planning physical activity. Share knowledge and recommendations from reliable health sources, such as the American Academy of Pediatrics www.AAP.org, the President’s Council on Physical Fitness and Sports www.fitness.gov, and your state’s Department of Education physical fitness guidelines.

Community – Connect to sources that are knowledgeable in children’s health issues and may offer services, such as pediatricians, physical education teachers, cooperative extension educators, park services, health counselors, physical and occupational therapists, and naturalists.

Program and Staff – Plan together to build positive, un-sedentary activities and environments. Be sure to include adults from outside programs who may work with the children, such as early intervention specialists or school nurses, cooks, and so forth. Discuss current trends of electronics use and its effect on children. Develop programming that incorporates enough time for physical activity in both structured and unstructured ways.

Children – Discover the children’s interests, abilities, likes, and dislikes. Ask for suggestions and help in planning physical activities and setting up the environment, such as building an obstacle course out of easy-to-find and safe objects.
Recommended physical activity

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) has age-appropriate recommendations for physical activity. The following are guidelines from the AAP for infants and toddlers and preschool-aged children (4-6):

All children from birth to six years should have two to three opportunities a day for active outdoor play, weather permitting. They should engage in two or more structured or teacher led activities per day such as games that involve active movement whether it is indoors or outdoors. Opportunities to continually develop age appropriate gross motor and movement skills are also recommended. Age specific recommendations include the following:

Infants – Between birth and twelve months of age, infants should be taken outside two to three times per day, as tolerated. They should have supervised tummy time every day when they are awake. Care providers should interact with an awake infant on their tummy for short periods of time (3-5 minutes) and increase this amount as the infant shows enjoyment of the activity.

Toddlers – Children age 12 months to three years should be allowed 60-90 minutes per eight hour day for vigorous physical activity that includes running. This can be indoor or outdoor play. Children under the age of two should not have any screen time.

Preschool-aged children – Free play should be encouraged with emphasis on fun, playfulness, exploration, and experimentation while being mindful of safety and proper supervision. Preschoolers should be allotted 90-120 minutes of vigorous playtime each day. In addition, parents and caregivers should reduce sedentary transportation by car and stroller and limit screen time to two hours per day.

Active play is essential for the growth and development of young children. It should not be withheld as a means of punishment as this is counterproductive. Children should also not be inactive for more than 15 minutes at a time with the exception of meals and naptime. Even the use of infant equipment such as swings and infant seats should be limited to short periods of time.

Daily physical activity has many benefits including bone development, improved sleep, promotion of social and cognitive skills and setting the foundation for healthy behaviors that will help reduce the risk of chronic disease in adulthood.

Connect to the outdoors

Recent research indicates that the amount of time U.S. children spend outside has declined by 50 percent in the last two decades. Research also shows that children now spend 44.5 hours a week in front of some type of electronic screen. One of the major results of decreased time in nature is a decreased amount of physical activity. Time in nature is needed to support physical activity and is also said to improve academic performance, concentration, balance, coordination, and self-esteem, and even reduces the severity of symptoms of Attention Deficit/Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD).

“Go outside and play” are words that many environmental and health-related groups want to bring back into the everyday repertoire. Many groups are urging a “Call to Action” to promote the health benefits of daily, unstructured outdoor play for children and families.

Sources:


Healthy Child Care. www.healthychild.net


PA Department of Education. “Physical activity during and after the school day.” PA School District Action Plan.


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