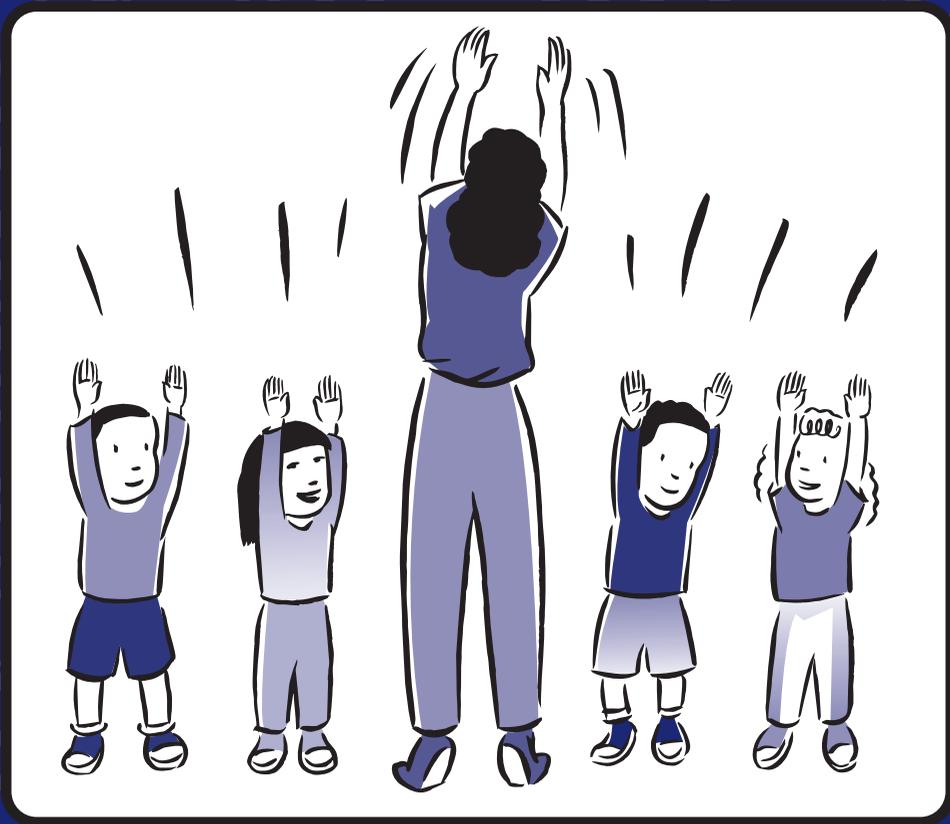


**Teach & Talk**

# **Nutrition & Activity**



**ETR Associates**

**Marcia Quackenbush, MS, MFT, CHES**

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**William M. Kane, PhD, CHES**

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**ETR Associates** (Education, Training and Research) is a nonprofit organization committed to fostering the health, well-being and cultural diversity of individuals, families, schools and communities. ETR Associates is a leading producer of comprehensive health education curricula and resources that empower students in grades K–12 with the information and skills to make positive health choices. Learn more about our high-quality materials by contacting us at 1-800-321-4407 or visiting our website at [www.etr.org/pub](http://www.etr.org/pub).

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# How to Use This Book

**I**t's important for kids to eat healthy diets and get lots of physical activity because this type of lifestyle will help prevent disease, disability and premature mortality in their adult years. But there are also immediate benefits for children and teachers that are very compelling—fit kids are better students. Better students have greater self-confidence and higher self-esteem. Children with high self-esteem are more willing to learn new skills. The cascade of here-and-now benefits that derive from better fitness goes on and on.

Just how much can one teacher or school community really do to improve children's nutrition and physical activity levels? It's true that many of these behaviors are shaped by the family and community. But the classroom community is also a powerful influence in children's lives. Your class or school can have a significant impact on children's behaviors.

**This book can enhance your efforts to help students make healthy choices about fitness and nutrition.**

**It gives you the following tools and support:**

- ◆ **Background information**—information about current childhood trends in fitness and diet; how developmental issues influence children's choices around activity and nutrition; and ways to introduce the concepts of eating nutritiously, being active, and accepting and appreciating one's body that will be most useful to children in the early elementary grades.
- ◆ **Ways to invite the conversation**—strategies to help children become aware of the kinds of choices they make about activity and eating, and of how these choices can lead to greater

## How to Use This Book

energy, more alertness, and higher self-esteem and satisfaction; and, because most kids aren't asking direct questions about nutrition or physical activity, strategies teachers can use to raise these issues in the context of day-to-day classroom experiences and school life.

- ◆ **Ideas for teaching skills**—suggestions for making ideas concrete by giving kids real-life opportunities to practice making healthy choices, try different strategies, fail once or twice, and succeed often.
- ◆ **Working with the power of peers**—strategies for using the dynamics of peer interactions to encourage smart, healthy choices around eating, physical activity and having a positive body image.
- ◆ **Ways to join with families**—ideas and activities to help children use their classroom learning about physical activity and eating at home, and techniques for involving parents in effective alliances that can reinforce the lessons in the classroom in meaningful and powerful ways.
- ◆ **Curriculum integration**—ways to reinforce important health concepts about nutrition and physical activity in other subject areas.
- ◆ **Resources**—where to go for more information and support, for the teacher and as interesting and useful resources for student projects.
- ◆ **Classroom activities**—a variety of interactive activities that help students learn about nutrition and fitness, and develop the skills to make healthy lifestyle choices as they grow.

# 1 **Healthy and Fit— It’s Natural for Kids**

## **P**icture yourself in the middle of an elementary school playground.

A ball soars through the air. Children’s voices shout, call, argue, laugh. A child dashes past, in a blur of color and sound. All around you are children jumping, running and moving—an energetic blend of physical activity and discovery. Children have a natural love for this thing adults call “fitness.” Most kids start out life in great physical shape.

### **As they grow, children develop many qualities that support physical activity and healthy eating:**

- ◆ **They need to move.** Children’s bodies crave opportunities to develop both fine and gross motor skills. It’s a developmental imperative. Bones, nerves and muscles need challenges to keep growth on track. Kids want to climb higher and jump farther today than they did yesterday. Movement feels good and natural to them.
- ◆ **They like responsibility.** Children enjoy the idea of taking steps to care for their bodies. They like the sense of maturity they get when they do things in a grown-up way—from brushing their teeth to bandaging a small scrape, to choosing food that will give them energy for the soccer game.
- ◆ **They like to eat.** Most kids enjoy eating, an essential part of keeping the body healthy.
- ◆ **They like to think.** Children eagerly solve puzzles and problems. They enjoy learning about cause and effect. They’re interested in how the choices they make about movement and eating affect how they feel and what they’re able to do. They like

having a brain that works, which can only happen if they're well nourished.

- ♦ **They like to feel strong.** Children who eat nutritious foods and are physically active will have greater strength, stamina and concentration than those who don't. Children love feeling strong and capable, so they get a great pay-off for making healthy choices about food and activity.
- ♦ **They like to make choices for themselves.** Children relish the chance to make their own choices and to feel independent. Being able to make smart choices is the foundation of healthy eating and physical activity.

## **What's Wrong with This Picture?**

Even though many elements naturally draw children toward healthy physical activity and nutritious eating, there are a lot of inactive, unhealthy kids. Children don't necessarily know how to use their natural attributes in ways that automatically lead to healthy choices. They have the basic talent, but they need help to learn the skills.

The current trends in children's fitness are truly alarming. Medical experts and the federal government have identified poor fitness in children as an urgent concern. Children are eating more fat, consuming more calories and moving less. The incidence of childhood and adolescent obesity has more than doubled in the past 30 years.

Most broad-based population studies of children's physical activity examine older children and adolescents. But in this data are disturbing trends relevant for younger children as well. For example, children's level of physical activity drops as they grow older. At age 12, 70% of children are engaging in regular, vigorous activity. By age 21, this drops to 42% for men and 30% for women, and the decrease continues as adults grow older.

Girls become even less active than boys as they grow. This trend starts in the early elementary grades and continues through high school. Boys and girls also respond to different motivators when they do choose to be active. Boys tend to be in it for the competition—they want to become better athletes and win more often. Girls want to maintain their weight and look better. Boys in general are more confident of their physical abilities and more willing to try new activities.

At the same time that children's actual fitness is declining, their worries about body image are leading to greater problems with disturbed eating. By the time they reach high school, significant numbers of students will be restricting their eating in unhealthy ways. Girls are especially likely to become obsessed with achieving unrealistic standards of thinness, and the foundation for these troubling trends is established during the elementary school years.

Several studies have noted dissatisfaction with appearance and dieting efforts among a good portion of elementary school students. In one report, 40% of fifth grade girls were trying to lose weight. In another, 42% of girls in grades 1–3 wanted to be thinner. Symptoms of eating disorders, which used to emerge most often in adolescence, are now noted among children as young as age 9.

## What's Going On?

Why are these problems with fitness, nutrition and body image getting worse instead of better? There are many reasons children today are less active and choose less nutritious diets, and many influences may lead them to feel troubled by their appearance. Each individual child has his or her own story, but in general the following factors stand out.

### Television

Much of the decline in children's health and fitness can be attributed to the influence of television. **TV thwarts children's attraction to healthy choices in a variety of ways:**

- ◆ **A lot of TV means a lot less activity.** One of the most insidious aspects of television is that it transforms children's natural tendency to be active and vigorous. Kids who watch significant amounts of TV aren't physically active. Every hour they sit in front of the TV screen is another hour they aren't walking, dancing, riding a bike or playing sports.
- ◆ **A lot of TV means a lot of food ads.** Children's television programming is filled with ads for foods with poor nutritional value. Children are urged to start the day with sugary breakfasts, quench thirst with sweetened drinks, keep energy revved up with high-fat snacks, and make high-fat foods the center of the mid-day and evening meals. Massive amounts of advertising for these foods normalize this kind of eating and make it seem as if sweet cereals and double cheeseburgers are the best and most common foods to eat. Kids join right in. Many build an entire diet on the types of foods promoted by TV advertising.

### **Couch Potato Kids**

- 26% of U.S. children watch 4 or more hours of television each day; 67% watch at least 2 hours a day.
- Watching TV takes up more of a child's life than any other activity except sleeping. By the time children graduate from high school, they will have spent an estimated 15,000–18,000 hours watching television, compared with about 12,000 hours in school.
- Boys and girls who watch 4 or more hours of TV each day are more likely to be overweight or obese than other children.
- Findings linking high amounts of TV watching with greater rates of overweight hold true even when adjustments are made for socioeconomic status, ethnicity, maternal overweight, aptitude scores, region, season and population density.
- One researcher estimates that 25% of the recent increase in adolescent obesity is attributable to increases in television viewing, and raises the possibility of an association with eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia as well.

- ◆ **TV stimulates eating.** Food ads on TV are designed to make people want a particular food. When children see a food ad, they're more likely to get up and go to the kitchen seeking a similar type of food. Children's viewing of ads for less nutritious foods is linked to increased caloric intake because the ads succeed in stimulating the immediate behavior of seeking sugary and high-calorie snacks.
- ◆ **TV sedates viewers.** Television doesn't make people want to jump up and take a brisk walk in the cool autumn air. It makes them want to settle down more deeply into the couch cushions. Instead of using their imaginations and muscles to develop an active game after school, children watch TV alone, or sit passively with siblings and friends before the screen. They often bring the same passivity to the classroom.
- ◆ **TV normalizes standards of appearance and physical ability that are abnormal for most people.** Children watch thousands of hours of programming and advertising that show thin, unblemished people who solve complex problems in the briefest segments of time. Media images of women in particular (but increasingly of men as well) idealize individuals who are clinically underweight and who may even become ill because their bodies are so poorly nourished. Children with properly nourished bodies may look to these role models and feel dissatisfied with their own healthy body shape and size.

### **Fast Food Frenzy**

- Children see, on average, over 11,000 ads for poor-nutrition foods on TV each year.
- The ads work. When children are in grocery stores, they are more likely to request foods that are highly advertised.
- Ads for poor-nutrition foods seem to have a stronger impact on boys than girls.
- Children who watch more television are more likely to have unhealthy eating habits and unhealthy conceptions about food.

## Chapter 1

TV will continue to complicate efforts to help children be active and make healthy food choices. Cultural commentator Jerry Mander (1992) describes some of the physical effects of TV viewing, along with some of the social and personal consequences:

- ◆ The flicker of the TV screen, 60 times a second, induces a type of hypnosis.
- ◆ The brain enters an alpha-wave state, a slow, steady pattern in which the mind is especially passive and receptive.
- ◆ The pace of TV advertising and programming doesn't allow time for personal responses, questions or reflection. This increases the tendency to receive information, ideas and suggestions passively.
- ◆ The dramatic and often violent nature of TV programs and many ads stimulates a typical fight-or-flight stress response, but the intellect recognizes that this is irrational. One doesn't fight with a TV set. Fast cycling through this stress response, without appropriate time for it to resolve, leaves viewers (especially children) anxious and disorganized.
- ◆ The use of TV as an easy solution when children are bored or restless impairs the development of creativity, initiative and social skills. When kids don't have TV to turn to, they struggle with the discomfort of boredom. They solve the problem by creating opportunities to be social, thoughtful or active (e.g., to play with friends, read a book, walk or run outdoors).
- ◆ The high-speed perceptual shifts in TV (fast edits to new objects, new views, new characters, a different time) make everyday life seem glacially slow by comparison. This creates anxiety and discontent, and a heightened tendency to be easily bored by real life.

## Other Trends

Television isn't the only culprit contributing to children's declining fitness, however. **Here are some others:**

- ◆ **Computer and video games.** Like TV, computer games also provide a passive, hypnotic sort of entertainment. They can be immensely time-consuming, and time spent in these passive pursuits is time not spent in physical activity.
- ◆ **Isolation.** Many children spend time alone after school because their parents work. TV and computers are common pastimes in these situations.
- ◆ **Unsafe neighborhoods.** In many cases, home is the safest place for children. Opportunities to interact with other children in an outdoor environment aren't available because of crime, heavy traffic, lack of sidewalks or other concerns about safety.
- ◆ **Lack of playgrounds.** Playgrounds often are not available to kids. Schools and communities may not be able to keep equipment in good repair or provide adult supervision. In these circumstances, playgrounds are sometimes closed to avoid liability for injuries. In other cases, there may not be physical space available for a playground. When children do not have open spaces and well-maintained outdoor equipment for play, they find other alternatives—most often, TV or computer games indoors.
- ◆ **Cuts in physical education and other activities.** In some schools, recess time has been eliminated and school breaks have been reduced. Physical education classes have been severely cut back or canceled altogether. This may come from pressure to improve academic performance, or the mistaken belief that keeping students in class longer will allow them to learn more

### **Less Physical Education**

- Overall, rates of participation in physical education are falling.
- Students who do participate in P.E. often spend much of their class time being inactive.
- Children who do not have a P.E. class during school are likely to be less active in the rest of their lives.

and perform better on standardized tests. Some schools cannot afford to fund a position for playground supervisor.

- ♦ **Busy families and hectic lives.** Working parents understandably look for the easiest ways to provide food for their families. Good nutrition may be sacrificed for convenience. Many children’s families habitually choose high-fat, less nutritious foods for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Parents who are working more also have less time to be physically active with their children. They have few models themselves for ways to fit family physical activity into their lives.
- ♦ **Pervasive myths about body image.** Parents, like children, can be deeply affected by media images of “perfect” (actually, overly thin) models and actors. Most adults are dissatisfied with their bodies, and many children see and hear the distress adults feel. Some parents live out their own conflicts about body image through their children. They may criticize a child’s appearance, make jokes about a child’s weight, or put a healthy child on an inappropriate diet.

### **Movement Feeds the Brain**

It is ironic that so many schools have cut back opportunities for children to be active. Recess breaks and P.E. classes give children a chance to run, jump, dance and shout, which moves the blood and improves the flow of oxygen to their brains. This, in turn, improves their ability to think, to concentrate and to do well in their classroom work.

Many discipline problems in elementary school could be improved if children had more opportunities to appropriately discharge the physical energy that naturally builds up in their bodies over the course of the day. This is particularly important for children with attention challenges (such as attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder—ADHD). Frequent chances to move help kids be more successful students.

## New Ways of Thinking: Lifetime Activities

The U.S. Public Health Service has set objectives for the nation's health in the program *Healthy People 2010*. They make the following suggestions concerning children and physical activity:

- ◆ Increase participation in daily physical education classes.
- ◆ Include physical activity as a subject in health education classes and other subjects.
- ◆ Increase the amount of class time in P.E. during which kids are active.
- ◆ Include adaptive P.E. programs for children with special needs.
- ◆ Increase the proportion of children making choices to do things other than watch television.
- ◆ Increase the proportion of trips made by walking.
- ◆ Help children develop skills and attitudes that enhance participation in lifetime physical activity.

Emphasis is now being placed on helping children find ways to make a commitment to lifetime physical activity—active pastimes they can enjoy throughout their lives. The focus is on personal enjoyment of movement and activity, and on setting personal goals rather than competitive ones. Lifetime activities include walking, cycling, dancing and other pastimes that individuals can pursue easily on their own or with friends.

In school physical education programs there has been, historically, an emphasis on team sports. While rewarding for the athletically gifted child, competitive environments can be agony for children who are not physically talented. Also, boys tend to do better than girls in competitive environments because of their greater sense of self-efficacy. And, while there are many benefits to the skills and motivations that inspire children in team sports, such sports do not usually develop a foundation for lifetime physical activity.

### **What's Good About Physical Activity**

**The benefits of regular physical activity in childhood and adolescence include:**

- Better strength and endurance
- Support of bone and muscle development
- Weight control
- Lower stress and anxiety
- Improved self-esteem
- Improved blood pressure and cholesterol levels
- Enjoyment
- Opportunities to socialize

### **The Problems of Inactivity**

**The consequences of physical inactivity in childhood include:**

- Increased chance of obesity in childhood
- Increased chance of obesity in adulthood
- Setting health habits in childhood that can lead to serious health problems as an adult, including heart disease, diabetes, colon cancer, high blood pressure and early death

## **Eating Well: Food for Thought**

Along with physical activity, nutrition also has a great influence on children's current and future health. While the long-range benefits of good nutrition are significant, there are immediate advantages as well, because children who are well nourished are more successful students who can concentrate and stay on task better.

Unfortunately, most children today do not eat nutritionally suffi-

cient diets. They tend to get too many calories from sugary and high-fat foods, leaving significant gaps in their intake of fresh fruits and vegetables, grains, calcium-rich foods and protein.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services offer the following advice concerning healthy eating:

- ◆ Eat a variety of foods.
- ◆ Eat lots of grain products, vegetables and fruits.
- ◆ Choose an overall diet that is low in fat, saturated fat, trans fat and cholesterol.
- ◆ Choose a diet that is moderate in sugars, salt and sodium.

It's also important for children to eat foods high in iron and vitamin C to avoid iron deficiency, and to have adequate calcium intake, especially throughout childhood, adolescence and young adulthood.

However, CDC statistics on what kids really eat show that many are far from fulfilling these guidelines:

- ◆ 8 in 10 eat too much fat (more than 30% of total calories).
- ◆ 9 in 10 eat too much saturated fat (more than 10% of total calories).
- ◆ Children and adolescents eat an average of about 3-1/2 servings of fruit and vegetables a day. Over half eat less than 1 serving of fruit a day.
- ◆ French fried potatoes account for a significant portion of the vegetable count in these diets. A third of kids eat less than 1 serving of vegetables a day that isn't fried.
- ◆ Over 90% of adolescent females are consuming less than the recommended allowance of calcium, and during the teen years calcium consumption falls with age.

There are a number of ways poor nutrition manifests in children's lives and affects their school performance. Some children are

hungry on a regular basis, frequently missing breakfast or other meals because of poverty or family disorganization. Others have sufficient food in the home but do not eat breakfast because of family habits or their own disinclination to eat early in the morning. Some children eat regularly, but have a diet with poor nutritional value that does not provide sufficient fuel to keep brain and body working at their best capacities.

Effects of undernutrition include:

- ◆ Shorter attention span
- ◆ Poor concentration and memory
- ◆ Decreased ability to perform complex tasks
- ◆ Less inquisitive, less interested in social environment, fewer social interactions
- ◆ Poorer scores on standardized tests
- ◆ More frequent illness and absenteeism
- ◆ Over time, greater risk of growth retardation and cognitive impairment

## **Weight, Body Image and Self-Esteem**

Health experts have several different ways to measure and evaluate weight. There is ongoing controversy about just what “normal” or “healthy” or “ideal” weight is. **Terms and concepts used by researchers and medical experts include:**

- ◆ **Underweight**—15% below an ideal or healthy weight. Health problems are more likely.
- ◆ **Ideal or healthy weight.**
- ◆ **Overweight**—10% above ideal weight.
- ◆ **Obese**—20% above ideal weight. Health problems are more likely.

Researchers have found a clear association between obesity and serious health risks. However, many studies have not looked carefully at actual health behaviors. It's important to separate the effects of inactivity and poor diet from the effects of weight. In studies that do this, people who are obese but physically active are often as healthy as their thinner counterparts.

The risks that contribute to heart disease are an inactive lifestyle and a high-fat, less nutritious diet. Overweight on its own is not necessarily a health problem for many people. It can be a significant social problem, however, because people who are obese may suffer from others' biases and judgments. Children who are overweight often experience hazing, ostracism and isolation. They are more likely to have low self-esteem and depression.

The most productive focus for all children, no matter what their weight, will be on choosing a healthy diet, finding ways to be active every day, and knowing how to appreciate their bodies. This will lead to better overall health, higher self-esteem and greater confidence. It is unfortunate that at a time when children's general health clearly would be improved by a more positive view of their own bodies, problems with body image are getting worse.

Dieting, obsession with body size and a distorted sense of body size used to be rare in young children, but the trend is shifting.

### **Health Risks for Obese Children**

#### **Obese children are at higher risk of:**

- High blood pressure
- Type 2 diabetes
- Sleep disorders, breathing problems
- Orthopedic problems
- Gall bladder disease
- Poor self-esteem and other psychological problems

Concern about weight, discontent with body image and preoccupation with dieting are no longer unusual in the elementary grades. Girls continue to be more affected by these problems than boys, but boys are increasingly showing these patterns too.

The beginnings of eating disorders emerge at early ages for some children. Many researchers and social commentators have remarked on connections between self-esteem and eating disorders. In one prospective study, girls with low self-esteem at age 11–12 were more likely to have serious symptoms of eating disorders by age 15–16.

Children with distorted body image and low self-esteem do not have the resources to choose a healthful diet and lifestyle. They will not move toward adulthood with vigor and stamina. Instead, by the time they reach adolescence, they are likely to have a history of failed diet attempts, frustration with their bodies and disappointment in themselves.

Children who actually are overweight may have multiple experiences of teasing, harassment and bullying that are tremendously counterproductive to developing a healthy relationship with their bodies.

## **What Schools and Teachers Can Do**

Teachers may be frustrated by the tangled threads of children's approach to fitness. Children need to be active, but would rather watch TV, and once they're seduced by the hypnotic power of television it becomes difficult to change their viewing habits. Children need to eat nutritiously, but TV and popular culture urge them to make poor choices. Kids eat high-calorie, high-fat, nutrition-poor foods; sit still too much; gain weight; and then become discouraged because their body image doesn't match that of popular models and TV actors.

Is it realistic to expect schools to counteract these negative influences in any truly meaningful way? Yes. A lot can be done. Schools and teachers cannot solve the entire problem. They can take proactive steps to present different ideas and experiences that will contribute to a greater enjoyment of fit and healthy choices.

**Here are some things to do:**

- ♦ **Use kids' natural interests and capabilities** to increase activity and promote healthy eating.
- ♦ **Help kids value movement** and active pastimes.
- ♦ **Create peer values** for being active and nourishing the body.
- ♦ **Give students a chance to make real choices** about healthy eating.
- ♦ **Promote an environment of respect** and allow children to practice leadership in accepting physical differences.
- ♦ **Find creative, fun ways to integrate physical activity** into daily classroom routines.
- ♦ **Provide healthy modeling** through teachers and staff making choices to eat nutritiously and be physically active.

## **Reasonable Goals**

By taking these steps with students, you can bring a focus to healthy eating and moving. **The primary goals are to get kids to move more and sit less, to eat more nutritious foods, and to enjoy their bodies.**

- ♦ **Move more, sit less.** This is the simplest, most effective goal for every child (and adult) when it comes to healthy physical activity. Every time you find a way to get a child up and moving, you contribute to this goal.
- ♦ **Be active every day.** Successful lifelong activity means being active on all or most days of the week. Children can learn and practice these principles early. You can help them see that physical movement is one of life's great rewards.

- ◆ **Eat more fruits and vegetables.** It would be ideal if all kids ate 5 or more servings of fruits and vegetables each day, with an emphasis on fresh produce. But every step along the way is important. If a child eats 3 apples a week where she once would have eaten none, it's a great improvement. Helping kids feel good about making healthy choices is easiest when you keep the focus on *adding* a healthy choice (e.g., choosing to eat a carrot, an apple or some salad) rather than taking away something a child feels attached to (e.g., ice cream, a cheeseburger).
- ◆ **Drink water.** The healthiest possible thirst-quencher is water. It restores fluids to the body more effectively than sodas or juices. It is usually easily accessible and free. Most drinking water in this country is very safe. And the choice to drink water is something most children can follow up on, at school and at home.
- ◆ **Feel good about your body.** Your students will hear thousands of messages through the media that suggest that their own bodies are not enough—not thin enough, not strong enough, not tall enough, not pretty enough. They are growing up faced with a vast ocean of negative imagery about real bodies, but you can give them the means to stay afloat. Every chance a child has to appreciate something her or his body can do helps to counter these damaging messages. Children's expectations for themselves will be more realistic when they see people who do not have media-perfect bodies accomplish things of value, whether it be finishing a race, being a caring and thoughtful person, playing the violin, or telling a good joke.

## How Schools Can Help

Steps to improve students' approach to fitness can be taken at many different levels—within an individual classroom, as a school-wide effort, or as part of a district plan. While the emphasis of this book is on the kinds of things teachers can do in the classroom, it's important to acknowledge the larger school environment as well.

**Here are some of the ways schools can help.**

## **Improve Nutrition**

- ◆ Work with food services to develop healthier, kid-friendly meals. Involve students in menu planning and seek regular feedback on their satisfaction with school meals.
- ◆ Take steps to include healthy choices for snacking at school. This might include removal of candy and soda machines; providing vending machines selling fruit, yogurt and milk; or having refrigerators available so students can store perishables.
- ◆ Allow students to keep water bottles at their desks, and encourage them to drink water regularly throughout the day.
- ◆ Consider setting school policies that improve students' access to nutritious foods at school. For example, students are not to bring candy to school; classroom parties will include treats such as fresh fruit rather than candy; teachers will have budgets to provide appropriate snacks to students on certain days of the week.
- ◆ Choose fundraising activities that involve the sale of non-food items rather than candy and cookies.
- ◆ Sponsor schoolwide activities that explore and respect differences in family culture concerning food preferences and choices (e.g., family potlucks, school cookbooks, curry cook-offs, etc.).

## **Increase Physical Activity**

- ◆ Create a physical environment that supports activity (e.g., safe equipment, appropriate supervision).
- ◆ Be sure students have at least 2 recesses during the day (morning and afternoon), as well as recreational time at lunch.
- ◆ Sponsor schoolwide field days that include noncompetitive activities.
- ◆ Encourage students to participate in intramural or community-based sports leagues.
- ◆ Establish daily P.E. programs that support principles of personal enjoyment, personal progress and personal success.

- ◆ Support after-school activity programs. Make school facilities available for community use.

### **Help Students Develop a Healthy Body Image**

- ◆ Provide opportunities for students to see attractive and capable people of many different sizes, shapes and abilities acting as role models.
- ◆ Establish and enforce school policies that prohibit hazing or denigrating people for differences in body size, physical ability or appearance.
- ◆ Be sure school programs are accessible to students of all abilities.
- ◆ Use schoolwide programs to help students build confidence and comfort with their personal physical abilities (e.g., awards for “most improved” in physical education, essay contests on what kids like about being active, talent performances that focus on something other than exceptional athletic skills).

### **Involve the Community**

- ◆ Arrange classroom tours of businesses that support good nutrition or fitness (e.g., a gym, a bread factory, an organic farm).
- ◆ Support the presence of guest speakers in classrooms who can address nutrition and fitness (e.g., a local chef, the radio station’s “greengrocer,” a member of the high school soccer team).
- ◆ Collaborate with businesses or voluntary organizations to sponsor essay or poster contests on being active and choosing a healthy diet. Post winning entries at these business sites as well as on campus.
- ◆ Encourage local media to write stories about things students are doing that reflect good nutrition and fitness.
- ◆ Write articles for parent newsletters or a school website.

## **Give Students Media Skills**

Media-literacy programs can help children think critically about the influence of advertising, TV, videos and movies. Children with these skills have tools that can help them make better nutritional choices, choose more physical activity and less TV, and feel good about their own unique bodies.

## **Cause for Celebration**

There are a lot of gloomy predictions about children's fitness behaviors and their future health. At times the situation seems truly dire. But another way to think about this topic is with excitement, anticipation and enthusiasm.

The human body and all it is capable of is truly amazing. Your students can learn to value and provide good care to this physical vessel in which they will spend their lives. You can help them make healthy choices, feel independent, and know they are being smart. You can give them opportunities to demonstrate their sense of responsibility around younger children and peers. You can offer experiences that show them the real-life benefits of nourishing and embracing the wonders of the physical body—cause for celebration indeed.

# 2 **Helping Children Grow Up Fit and Healthy**

## **W**atching children grow is a delight.

With each passing year, they can do and understand more. They can throw a ball farther and follow the rules of a game with more concentration. They can interact physically with peers in more complex ways. They begin to try strategic approaches to improve their performance in games or individual play. They start to develop their own ideas and attitudes about physical activity, their own capabilities, their bodies and how they relate to food.

### **In looking at developmental issues that affect children's fitness, four broad categories are useful:**

- ◆ **Physical abilities**—what children are physically capable of doing, and what activities contribute to their healthy physical development.
- ◆ **Nutritional needs and eating behaviors**—what children need to eat to grow and stay healthy, and how they make choices about food.
- ◆ **Body image**—how children feel about their own and others' bodies.
- ◆ **Thoughts and beliefs**—how children understand issues of fitness and nutrition in their lives, and how their attitudes influence their behaviors.

## It Feels Good to Be Physical

Children have a natural drive to move their bodies, work their muscles, stimulate their nerves and support healthy bone development. Being physically active is an enjoyable state for children.

**It also offers many immediate benefits, including:**

- ♦ **Sensory rewards.** It feels good to move.
- ♦ **Concrete rewards.** Through physical activity, children can get things they want, such as the red ball on the other side of the room.
- ♦ **Social rewards.** Physical activity is often done with family or peers, and it feels good to be with other people.

Being active also directs and discharges children's energy in appropriate and gratifying ways, leading to a calmer state of mind and body.

## Guaranteed Success

It's also exciting for children to watch their own development in physical skills over time. A 6 year old can run 12 feet per second; a 12 year old can run 18. Throwing, kicking, jumping and catching all improve similarly. These are impressive changes, easy to measure and see over the course of a school year. Except in the case of children with severely limiting illness or disability, virtually all kids will

### **Quick Guide: Promoting Physical Activity**

- Give children lots of opportunities to move.
- Measure success through personal progress.
- Make time for child-invented games.
- Do movement in the classroom as well as outside.
- Have fun!

make huge improvements in their physical abilities over their elementary school years.

If you teach children to measure their current progress against their past abilities, they are almost certain to be winners in the comparison. All children develop at different rates and have different talents. There will always be a few who stand out in athletics. But children with less athletic talent have just as much ability to enjoy physical activity. They can gain just as much from its social and sensory benefits. You bring them to these rewards more readily when you help them see success in their accomplishments and note their own improvements.

## **Child-Invented Games**

Elementary school covers the ages when children begin to be involved in organized games with rules. This is a universal developmental process, seen in cultures all over the world. Many of the games children play are of their own invention, passed down from generation to generation. You probably played some of these games yourself as a child (e.g., kick the can, red rover, statues).

Child-invented games have a special place in children's development. They are usually won by simple physical skills and a good portion of luck. They do not necessarily favor the athletically gifted. Anyone can win, and anyone can lose.

These games also encourage children to try out different ideas—new strategies, collaboration with a friend, a shift in the rules—and to be creative and inventive. Perhaps a more aggressive start, or a quieter approach, or a wait-and-see attitude will work better the next time. There is little personal risk involved because there is no real shame in not being the winner, yet children learn a great deal about social interactions as they continually adapt and adjust the rules of their games.

Such games also use skills that can become a basis for lifelong activities. They usually are based on running and walking, which are excellent choices for lifelong activities. They also involve being

with others, being aware of the environment, and engaging the mind in creative thinking—the kinds of connections that make lifelong activities more interesting and meaningful for adults as well as children. When people bring qualities of awareness and inventiveness to physical activity, they find it more enjoyable and are more likely to keep up the effort.

Some developmentalists are concerned about the current shift in childhood play toward more structured sports, such as soccer or baseball. In these activities with adult-invented rules, there is more emphasis on developing a specific skill set (e.g., how to dribble a ball) rather than broader physical abilities and creative thinking. The risk of overuse injuries is increased. There is also more tendency toward individual competitiveness, and less collaborative problem solving. Structured sports favor the talented and often leave behind the average or unskilled players.

When organized sports for elementary school children are managed intelligently and appropriately, they are unlikely to do harm. But it is important to leave space for the more fluid experiences of child-invented games as well.

### **The Need to Move**

Elementary school children appreciate and benefit from many kinds of physical activities, at all grade levels. They need to move often, all day long. Children who do so will have healthier physical development, better moods and better concentration in class.

What a tragedy, then, that many schools have shifted toward *less* movement for children, not more. The average school-age child gets only 20 minutes of physical education a *week*. Some schools have no playgrounds or other outdoor areas for children to use.

In schools where this is the case, teachers can use in-class activities such as calisthenics, stretching, simple relays and relaxation exercises to give their students opportunities to move and enjoy their physical bodies.

## Are We Having Fun?

Fun is an important part of physical activity. In fact, when adults choose ways to be active, they are unlikely to sustain their regimen over time if they don't enjoy what they do. This is one reason it's so important to give kids positive and pleasant experiences with physical activity. You want them to know that under the right circumstances, being active is very enjoyable.

Teachers can help by giving children a framework that leads to increased enjoyment of physical activity. Find things you enjoy doing with your students, so they can see *you* having fun with physical activity. Use physical activity as a reward—students whose desks are in proper order, or those who turned in their homework on time, might get to take a special 10-minute walk around the playground. This is a much healthier approach than the idea of using activity as a punishment (e.g., running 3 times around the playground for turning in homework late).

## Food Is Important

All people need to eat. Everyone benefits from a nutritious and varied diet emphasizing foods such as grains, fruits and vegetables. Children, however, have some special needs in their diets because of their stage of physical development.

Children have higher energy requirements than adults because their bodies are still growing. A 7 year old needs about 30 calories per pound each day, while a 25 year old needs only about 15. Because children's stomachs are smaller than adults', they often need to eat small meals several times a day rather than two or three larger meals. And when a child's diet is not well balanced, dietary deficiencies develop more quickly, and with more serious consequences than for an adult.

Recent reports on obesity have led to general recommendations to lower the fat in children's diets. Most children have more fat in their diets than they need, so these guidelines are helpful. But, in some cases, fat in children's diets has been overly restricted.

Children under age 2 should not have their intake of fat or cholesterol limited in any way. For older children, an average daily goal of 30% of calories from fat, and less than 10% of calories from saturated fat, is usually recommended. (See Chapter 5 for more detailed dietary recommendations for children.)

## **What's a Teacher to Do?**

Teachers may not have a lot of influence on the particulars of an individual student's diet. It is possible, however, to work with children on general principles that lead to healthy eating. In some ways, of course, children's food choices are based on what is available in their homes. But there are a surprising number of opportunities for most children to make independent decisions about food.

Even very young children can influence family food buying. Parents buy foods their children request, or purchase the things they know their children will eat. Students often trade snacks and lunch items at school. By the time they reach third grade, most have some disposable income and are making choices to buy snack foods.

### **Quick Guide: Encouraging Healthy Food Choices**

- Validate the adventure of trying new tastes and textures.
- Create opportunities for students to try new foods with peers.
- Identify a willingness to try new foods as a sign of maturity.
- Make success possible by giving students realistic choices.
- Make food-tasting activities voluntary.
- Avoid deeper emotional struggles around eating.
- Have fun!

After school, children may have complete discretion about what they choose for snacks. Children who spend time at the homes of friends and relatives may be offered different kinds of food choices than are given at home. Clearly, many children are making independent choices about eating. A classroom emphasis on conscious choice (e.g., thinking about pros and cons, costs and benefits) can have an impact.

One of the most important goals in any nutritional effort is to get children to eat a variety of foods. One way to achieve this is to help students build a willingness to try new tastes. This can be challenging at times—most kids like to eat, but many are picky eaters. By understanding some of the issues in children’s personal and social development, you can use strategies that encourage them to be more adventuresome about food.

**Here are some ideas:**

- ◆ **It’s a fun adventure with friends.** Trying new foods can be fun, especially in the company of friends. When children are among their peers, some will be a little more adventurous. If one classmate is willing to try that strange orange pepper, perhaps others will too.

Classroom activities that encourage students to try new tastes and textures can help them expand their palette, although it’s a good idea to have a few guidelines. Make the activities fun and voluntary. Allow children to spit out any food they don’t like (quietly, into a napkin, which then goes into a proper trash receptacle). Students should understand that it’s just as useful to find out about a taste they *don’t* like as it is to find something they love. It’s all information that will help them make good choices and enjoy healthy eating.

- ◆ **It’s grown-up.** Because they have very sensitive taste buds, flavors that appeal to adults are sometimes too strong for children. But many kids will be intrigued by the notion that tasting new foods and experiencing new flavors is part of growing up. In their eagerness to be mature, they may actually try some new foods just because it’s a more grown-up thing to do.

- ♦ **It's cool to make choices.** Children like to make independent choices, and that's what many food choices are all about. When they know what a food tastes like, they can make an informed choice about it. When they try new things, they may add some fun foods to their diet. Praise your students for the kind of maturity it takes to do this.
- ♦ **Food can be comforting.** Help children make a connection to the good feelings they associate with certain foods. Encourage them to tell stories about the special foods in their family and culture. What foods do they eat on holidays and at celebrations? What would they choose to eat if they were planning a special meal? Children can share the comfort of their favorite foods with each other verbally or through drawings, and then actually

### **What About the Food Pyramid?**

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) developed the Food Pyramid to help Americans make healthier food and physical activity choices consistent with the Dietary Guidelines that represent federal nutrition policy. The guidelines and Food Pyramid were most recently revised in 2005 by the USDA and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

You can use the food pyramid to introduce your students to the different food groups and to the idea that some foods are better to eat than others. If you use the pyramid, check your students' understanding carefully, especially with younger children. They may not understand the differences between the food groups, or may worry about how to categorize familiar foods. Where should they put a favorite cereal that has both oats and sugar in it? Where does a turkey sandwich go?

Given the limited time most teachers have to talk about nutrition with their students, and because their main interest is in influencing behaviors, it may be more useful to work with kids on general guidelines: Eat more of this, less of that. Eat fruits and vegetables for snacks. Drink water. Be active every day.

bring some of those foods to class. The adventure of trying new foods can be linked with pleasant experiences of classroom camaraderie.

Kids will learn more through these kinds of activities when they experience success. You can help them achieve that success by giving them realistic choices. Don't suggest, for example, that they make a "grown-up" choice to eat an apple instead of a candy bar. (Frankly, many adults might have a hard time with that choice!) Instead, ask them to try 3 different kinds of apples and choose the flavor they like the best, or try a kind of fruit they've never tasted before.

## Eating Issues

Some children have found ways to experience power over others in the decisions they make about food. They may be able to influence a parent's choices in the grocery store by whining at strategic moments. They might draw attention to themselves by refusing to eat their dinner. When they linger over breakfast, they may enjoy the frustration in their mother's voice as she urges them to hurry.

### Kids and Diets

With the rise in childhood obesity, it might seem like a good idea to put overweight children on diets. But this is a complicated issue. The biggest problem is that *diets don't work*. Children (and adults) who are put on restrictive diets may not lose weight. If they do, most will gain the weight back in 1–5 years.

Some children require restrictive diets because of physical conditions (allergies, diabetes, metabolic disorders). But what most need are opportunities to move more and sit less, to eat lots of fruits and vegetables, and to drink plenty of water. The key is to help children develop lifelong approaches to healthy eating and physical activity—behaviors and choices they enjoy and *want* to keep doing.

They may have discovered that they get more of their favorite dessert when they bargain a bit over their broccoli.

Eating issues in the family are common among elementary school children, and can be genuinely distressing for child and parent alike. In most cases, the situation can be improved through family counseling or coaching for parents. But such interventions go beyond teachers' role and responsibilities.

Within the classroom, you'll achieve more for your class as a whole if you avoid these kinds of food-related power struggles with individual students. The classroom is not a productive place to work out family food issues. This is another good reason to make food activities voluntary, offer straightforward choices, and leave few opportunities for disruption.

## **The Body Is Great**

American children are eating more fat and calories, doing less physical activity, and poor fitness and obesity have become common problems. In a time like this, how has our culture become so obsessed with completely unrealistic images of the human body?

Girls aspire to extreme standards of thinness. Boys worry about being fat. Models in magazines look almost skeletal. In some cases, a single advertising image is actually a composite of body parts

### **Quick Guide:**

#### **Developing a Positive Body Image**

- Teach that every body is a good body.
- Encourage enjoyment of sensation and help students see the body as the source of many good feelings.
- Praise the body for the many wonderful things it can do.
- Foster respect for differences in size, shape and ability.

from several different individuals. Strangest of all, the 98% of people who do not meet these fantastic ideals are the ones who feel abnormal.

Volumes have been written about body image, and theories explaining these trends abound. But, in terms of children's developmental issues, you can do some very important work using just a few broad concepts.

## **Body Image Develops Naturally**

When infants are born, they do not have a sense of separateness from the people around them who provide nurturance and respond to their needs. They see themselves as extensions of their caregivers. There isn't any "you and me"; there's just "me."

Infants express their physical states—hunger, comfort, cold, wet, pain, sleepiness—and they notice when the environment (which includes the caregivers they aren't really aware of) responds. They begin to sense at some level that they can have an impact on their needs—crying brings attention, sucking brings food. Over time, they start to see a separateness between themselves and the world. This is when body image first starts to develop.

Once infants become aware of their bodies, they are fascinated by the experience. They love to touch, watch and taste everything they can. The body is a wonderful thing, a source of great pleasure and gratification. It can also be a source of frustration. Infants struggle when they can't reach high enough or move fast enough to get something they want.

By the time children are toddlers, the boundary between self and others becomes more distinct. Children are excited about their independence. They love to see the impact they can have on their world and the people in it. They see that people are charmed by a smile, annoyed by repetition of the word "no," or interested and responsive if they try to run away. Toddlers enjoy all the things they can achieve with their bodies.

Body image develops in more complex ways as children learn more about what their bodies can do. They establish an understanding that they are either male or female. They learn where in the family they can find approval and physical nurturing. They can do more physically as they grow. They are eager to climb, run, catch and jump. Children who have had generally positive experiences in these regards will have a healthy and positive body image.

By the time they enter school, they are able to compare their physical abilities against those of their peers and may feel either good or bad about how they measure up. They will also have some values about the intrinsic merits of boys and girls (e.g., boys are stronger and braver, girls are smarter and nicer), and may personalize this to some degree (e.g., I am a boy, and I am better than a girl).

### **Poor Body Image Is Learned**

While the development of body image is a natural process, poor body image is a learned phenomenon. Children develop a sense of the physical body and its worth through personal experiences and interactions with others, including the media.

#### **Here are some of the ways body image is formed:**

- ◆ **Children's personal experiences affect their feelings about their bodies.** Positive feelings are built when they have gratifying experiences based on physical sensation and ability. These might include being physically nurtured in the family (hugs and kisses, being cuddled), or experiencing success in their efforts to do physical tasks (being able to hammer in the nail, lift the box or ride the bike). They benefit from a sense of appreciation for the things the body can do, and from comfort with its physical processes. One of the most helpful personal experiences is feeling that their body is a nice place to be.

This often is not the case for children who are abused or neglected, who are in physical pain because of illness or disability, or who just aren't given many chances to do physical things they enjoy. Children who have been taught to be ashamed

of natural physical processes, such as elimination or sexual feelings, may also be uncomfortable with their bodies.

◆ **Children hear messages from others about sensation.**

They learn how they *should* respond to the sensations in their bodies. Do their parents praise them for being active and energetic, or are they disciplined for being noisy and impulsive? Do they have lots of opportunities to be active at school and home, or are they constantly required to constrain their impulses? Has anyone taught them to notice the sensations of the physical world (e.g., a beautiful sunset, a cold breeze, a warm bath, legs tired after hiking, chest burning after running)? When children are invited into these kinds of sensory experiences with a sense of delight and wonder, the body becomes an exciting arena for discovery, pleasure and invention.

◆ **Children hear messages from others about their physical capabilities.** Children thrive when they are praised for their successes, and the physical body offers many opportunities to experience this. Can you feel the pointed edges of the grass on your bare feet? Doesn't it feel good to stand and stretch after sitting still at your desk for 45 minutes? Isn't it great that you can climb to the top of the jungle gym and see over the roof of the school?

These experiences are not limited to the athletically gifted or the poetically introspective. All children can hear positive messages about what their bodies can do if the adults and peers in their life are wise enough to pass these along. Unfortunately, when children hear comparisons in which they don't match up to others (Melissa can climb higher, Harry can stretch deeper), it is harder to enjoy these wondrous if common physical abilities, or to feel good about having them.

◆ **Children hear messages from others about their appearance.** Children are usually concerned about appearance by the time they reach school. As early as kindergarten, clothing becomes more gender restricted, especially for boys (no more flowered shorts or pink sweat shirts), as does toy selection.

Children who are heavier than average, smaller or taller than their peers, or who look different in some other way become sensitive to these differences.

Such sensitivities continue and often deepen as children grow. Fashion-conscious second-graders want the right brand of shoes. Children as young as age 8 or 9 may begin to weigh themselves regularly, concerned that they are becoming fat. Peers who have not been taught to cherish principles of community and inclusiveness may tease and ostracize those who appear different.

Concerns over appearance are also driven by the imagery from popular media that bombards children daily. Heroes in the movies are almost universally handsome and capable. Models in magazines are thin and unblemished. The main characters in TV shows are attractive and confident. If a show includes people who are plain, overweight, disabled, uncertain or wearing less than fashionable clothing, they will be minor players. Clearly, the media winners are all strong, thin, stylish and sure of themselves, while in the real world few of us are all of these things.

## **Positive Messages and Experiences Make a Difference**

There are many influences that seem determined to make both children and adults feel lousy about their merely mortal bodies. This can result in great harm when the outcome is cruelty among peers, disordered eating and low self-esteem. But there is a lot that can be done in the school community and the classroom to counteract these negative influences and give students skills to feel good about themselves and others.

Children will be dealing with these kinds of peer and media messages their entire lives. When they have a set of alternative messages they can reflect on and believe in, they will have some important resources that support development of a healthier body image.

**Here are some strategies to use:**

- ◆ **Show students a range of body imagery in the classroom.** Be sure books, posters, videos, drawings, stories and other image-based media show people of many sizes, shapes and abilities. Provide an environment where the “perfect” body presented in popular media is the exception (as it is in real life), and the wonderful “average” bodies most people have are the norm. Include lots of images of physically robust and active people.
- ◆ **Teach critical thinking skills.** Children can learn to evaluate the images and messages they see in the media. They enjoy thinking critically, and they hate to be manipulated. They are protective of those they care about. These are fine qualities to bring to an analysis of the latest action-adventure film, cereal advertising campaign or fashion spread in a preteen magazine.
- ◆ **Promote and practice respect among peers.** When children feel a sense of connection and belonging to a community—their classroom, for example—they know that each member has a valuable and special contribution to make. In this setting, hazing, bullying and teasing are less likely, and, if such events do occur, remedies are more straightforward.
- ◆ **Teach students to notice and praise their own abilities.** Children can learn skills that help them “talk back” to the media or counter a negative experience. If a TV ad suggests that young women aren’t valuable if they aren’t thin, is there something a child can say in response? If the after-school soccer coach humiliates a child for making a mistake, what would be a way for the child to feel proud of taking the risk and making the effort to play the game in the first place? An internal ability to feel good about the body’s capabilities can be a great ally in the effort to maintain a positive body image.
- ◆ **Give chances for success individually and in groups.** All of this positive body image learning can be powerfully reinforced through success. Ideally, children will find ways to enjoy their physical abilities individually and in group settings.

## Critical Thinking: The Body's Best Ally

One of the benefits of a healthy, well-nourished body is that it has a brain that works well and likes to think. The thinking brain is a powerful ally in efforts to help children choose physical activity and nutritious eating. As with physical development, children naturally make huge strides in their mental abilities over their elementary school years. Experiences of success are built right in. Once again, virtually all children will be able to see how they are able to think more clearly, thoroughly and effectively over time.

**When you promote critical thinking skills in your students, you intervene at several levels:**

- ♦ **First, you give them powerful tools they can use to their advantage.** They can evaluate the messages they hear in the media about fitness, physical activity, food and body image. They can counteract negative messages about body image or physical ability from peers, family or others.
- ♦ **Second, you show them a living record of their own improvements.** They will get better at critical thinking over time and with practice, and you can point out how they are analyzing messages more effectively. They'll enjoy this sense of greater competence.
- ♦ **Third, you offer a wonderful example that links healthy choices to immediate benefits.** Children who are well nourished think more clearly. Children who have lots of chances to be physically active have better concentration. Making smart choices around food and activity means they will do better in school, at play, in sports, in music—or almost any activity that involves the brain and the body.

## Helping Kids Move Along

Keeping developmental issues in mind helps teachers strategize classroom interventions. Children are rarely at a fixed stage of development in any of their capacities. They exhibit a certain fluidity, forward and back, toward more sophisticated thinking and then back to less. For many children, physical development also fluctuates—toward more skill at throwing, then to a period of awkwardness, and then toward even better skill.

Teachers have every reason to expect their students to make overall improvements in thinking, physical abilities and decision making. In an environment that welcomes experimentation, creativity, invention and determination, a great deal of developmental movement is possible.

While you never want to force children along in their development, you can certainly issue the invitation. Growing, learning and changing are exciting processes. When you help children experience this excitement, they'll gain momentum in their development because it will be rewarding and fun.

# 3 What Kids Need to Know

**A**n understanding of nutrition, regular physical activity and a positive body image will give children many benefits to make their lives fulfilling and healthy. But just how do teachers get across the necessary information? How can lessons about fitness and nutrition fit into the many already existing demands teachers face—including ever-shrinking classroom hours, requirements of school or district curricula and pressure to prepare students for standardized testing?

It involves more than giving children facts, of course. Facts about nutrition or fitness are easy to teach, and may intrigue and engage students, but facts do little to influence behavior. Teachers need to give children a powerful way of understanding these ideas, of seeing themselves in the physical world and within a social community.

The best way to do this is to focus on several important, overriding concepts that will give students tools they need to make smart choices about real-life behaviors. Lessons can have long-lasting impact when they offer students gratifying and memorable experiences in relation to physical activity, healthy food choices and feelings about their own bodies. You can do this within existing lesson plans, or by bringing in new materials. (See the Resources section for some materials you might use.)

## **Key Qualities for Memorable Experiences**

Certain qualities help students remember and use their learning experiences. These principles can be applied to many subject areas, such as health, social studies or reading. They can work whether your school has an extensive and well-developed physical education program, or no P.E. at all; whether you have a fabulously well-equipped playground or not; and whether your students are skilled in and committed to physical activity, or have little understanding of such things.

**If you want your students to make genuine use of lessons about nutrition, activity and body image, be sure the lessons have one or more of these four key qualities.**

### **Fun**

Learning is fun. Experiencing the physical body is fun. Being with others is fun. Winning is fun. Eating is fun. There are so many ways for children to feel good in and about their bodies. They have a natural affinity for it, and teachers can invite and foster that natural enjoyment of the body in the activities they use to teach healthy behaviors.

Even challenges can be rewarding and fun for children—to succeed in learning a new skill or see improvement in an old one, to grasp a deeper concept about the strategy of a game, to try something new and discover they like it. When students experience keeping the body healthy as fun, they are much more inclined to develop and maintain healthy nutrition and fitness habits.

### **Mastery**

Children are developmentally keyed to master new skills. It's a gratifying experience for them. Indeed, the ability to master skills is essential to the survival of the species. It's instinctive. It's necessary.

One of the ways to help children learn successfully in the physical activity and nutrition arenas is to give them many opportunities for mastery. This doesn't mean they need to win every time they play, or achieve some major milestone every time they try. But it does mean placing children's efforts within a thoughtful framework, giving them numerous chances to make small commitments as well as grand ones, and to achieve simple goals as well as complex ones.

For example, making a sincere effort (to try a new game, play a new position, use a new rule, sample a new flavor) requires its own kind of mastery. The praise children receive for such efforts fuels them to keep trying until they achieve results.

Promoting mastery does not mean offering empty praise for nonachievement. Some adults have a tendency to praise children lavishly, even for mediocre efforts. This kind of encouragement doesn't really help children, because the praise has little true meaning to them. But acknowledging children for making a commitment to some new task carries power and meaning and can lay a foundation for healthy actions and achieving larger goals.

## **Self-Esteem and Self-Efficacy**

When children have fun and experience mastery of new skills, they build self-esteem and self-efficacy. Better self-esteem means they tell themselves, "I'm worth the effort!" Better self-efficacy means they say, "I can do this new thing, and it's worth doing."

Children who have these qualities have a whole world open to them. They can go new places, explore fresh ideas, and make a strong effort to achieve many different things. Self-esteem and self-efficacy are keys to flexibility and success. They help kids take credit for their accomplishments, and take responsibility for areas that need improvement. These are great qualities to bring to physical activity and healthy eating. They are also essential elements of general mental and emotional health.

Encourage noncompetitive physical activities for elementary school children. One of the most persuasive reasons for doing so is that

these activities are most likely to foster self-esteem and self-efficacy. Kids with high self-esteem and a belief in their own abilities are more likely to enjoy being active, try new activities, and sustain activity over the coming years.

Similarly, it's important to offer nutrition activities that give children realistic choices. When children succeed in achievable tasks (e.g., try a new food, choose 1 of 3 kinds of fruit, drink more water), they build a sense of themselves as people who are committed to good health and smart choices. They develop the self-worth that tells them they deserve to be healthy and well nourished. They can make healthy choices as they grow and feel a sense of freedom about eating nutritiously and being physically active.

### **Respect for Self and Others**

Children who are having fun while they learn, mastering new skills and building self-esteem and self-efficacy can retain these experiences more solidly when they have a sense of belonging to a community. One of the greatest ways to build a sense of belonging is by consciously promoting principles of mutual respect among peers and between students and staff. Chapter 4 explores some of the powerful ways to use peer relationships to build students' commitment to and skills for making smart choices around activity and eating.

Principles of community and respect go a long way in protecting the value of students' other experiences. These principles help when a child is disappointed in an effort, when some children are less or more skilled than others, when children set different personal goals, or when a child is different from others in some way. In a community that cultivates respect, teasing a slower child doesn't make sense, nor does arrogance in a more talented child.

Through teachers' modeling and classroom lessons about community and respect, children can begin to test their own skills in this area. Are they able to place respect for others above personal gain?

Are they able to speak up when peers fail to act with respect? Will they stand by members of their community—their classmates—whatever their abilities?

Physical activity and body image are great arenas for practicing these skills. There is ample opportunity to tease the fat kid, the disabled child, the clumsy boy, the timid girl; to groan when their team ends up with the poor hitter; for the boys to end their playground game when the girls ask to join in. But, in each of these instances, and thousands of others, children also have the chance to be their better selves. Sometimes they will make that better choice—to reach out to and support kids who are different, to encourage each other, to include the entire group—especially when they can see all the benefits of belonging to a community built on principles of respect.

Children who experience and practice respect in their school community have the skills and resources they need to build a sense of belonging and commitment to their larger community. They might demonstrate this through participation in after-school sports programs, joining a special fundraising effort or helping out a neighbor.

## Key Concepts to Teach

Now just what are you are going to be teaching your students in these fun, mastery-oriented activities that build self-esteem and self-efficacy, and are practiced in an atmosphere of respect?

A few key concepts can lay the foundation for ongoing skills and a commitment to physical activity and healthy food choices in the future. **Here are some ideas that work well with children in the early elementary grades.**

### Move More, Sit Less

The federal government suggests that adults and children engage in moderate physical activity for 30 minutes or more, on most days

of the week. But measuring levels of activity or keeping track of time spent won't work for most children in an ongoing way. Instead, the simple guideline of "move more, sit less" is something kids can use over and over again, in every setting, all day long.

When hanging around the campus before school starts, what can they do to *move more, sit less*? After eating lunch, what can they do to *move more, sit less*? as a group in the classroom? at home after school? after watching an hour of TV? while waiting for a big sister to finish her clarinet lesson? The possibilities are endless, which means the opportunities for success (fun, mastery, self-esteem and self-efficacy) are infinite!

## **Find Activities You Enjoy**

Here's an interesting research finding about adults and physical activity: if people don't enjoy what they're doing, they won't keep doing it. They might keep it up for a few weeks, a few months, even a year or two. But, at some point along the way, usually sooner rather than later, they get tired, bored or frustrated, and give up.

Children aren't much different, except that they may never start an activity at all if they don't enjoy it. This is why it's important to give children many different activities to try. They can see which are more or less enjoyable for them, and notice the pleasant associations that go along with different activities. Do they like to be active with friends so they can visit? Do they like to be outside and see the sky? Do they like activities where they can watch the movement of a ball in space because it's interesting to see what happens?

It's a great idea to give children choices about activities where they identify things they like to do. Once again, realistic choices are important. What's their favorite physical activity? Of the 3 games they played in P.E. last week, which did they like best? What does the class vote to do for P.E. next week? What activity does the student of the week choose for the class P.E. period on Wednesday?

## **Eat Fruits and Vegetables for Snacks**

Many different curricula and learning activities emphasize the federal government's guideline of "5 a day"—5 servings of fruits or vegetables every day. One way for children to move toward this goal is to eat fruits and vegetables for snacks.

Because most children are happiest eating small amounts several times a day, snacking is an important source of children's nutrition. Ideally, a child would have breakfast, a mid-morning snack, lunch, an afternoon snack, dinner, and perhaps an evening snack. If the child ate one serving of a fruit or vegetable at each meal, and one serving for each snack, he or she would meet the 5-a-day goal.

A great way to promote this idea is to provide fresh fruits and vegetables as snacks at school. While few schools are able to do this on a regular basis, some are able to do so for special occasions. Teachers can also encourage students to bring fruits and vegetables to school for snacks. Praising students who choose healthy snacks like these can go a long way in supporting the 5-a-day goal.

## **Drink Lots of Water**

Everyone needs water to live, and people are healthiest when they drink lots of it. Getting kids to drink more water is an excellent broad goal in support of good nutrition.

Many children, however, drink more sodas and sugary fruit drinks than water. These drinks offer almost no nutritional value for the calories they provide. Many actually act as diuretics, causing children to lose more fluid than they are taking in.

Teaching children to quench their thirst with water is a great plan. Drinking water is a choice most children can make freely. It costs the family nothing, and no one else in the family has to change behavior to make it possible. It's a behavior children can choose successfully.

Drinking water is also a behavior that's easy to model and support in school settings. Teachers and students can keep water bottles at

their desks. Children can be encouraged to drink water before or after a recess break. They can measure their success individually or as a class using charts or graphs. All kinds of teaching approaches can explore the importance of water—its role in keeping the body healthy, keeping the planet healthy, providing refreshment, as well as the many recreational opportunities it offers for physical activity.

## **Try New Things**

It's important to help children learn to be adventurers, in both food choices and physical activity. Children need to find a variety of nutritious foods they love and activities they enjoy. The best way to do this is to try lots of different kinds of food and lots of different kinds of activity.

Children also tend to be comfortable with what's familiar, however, and some kids can be quite rigid about what they will and will not try. Teachers shouldn't get involved in power struggles about food or activity choices. But when students are praised for being adventuresome, especially among peers, they are more likely to keep trying new things.

## **More of This, Less of That**

This concept is useful for talking about all kinds of health choices with kids. Teaching children complex facts or government recommendations doesn't help them choose healthier behaviors. It's a rare child who would keep count of carbohydrate grams or levels of sodium over the course of a day. But all kids can understand "more of this, less of that."

### **Here are some examples:**

- ♦ **Fluids?** "More water, less soda."
- ♦ **Sweets?** "More fruit, less candy."
- ♦ **Munchies?** "More carrots and celery. Less snacking on salty, packaged foods."
- ♦ **Free time?** "More jumping around, less being a couch potato."

When making changes in diet or exercise it usually doesn't work, with adults or children, to completely take away something a person really likes. Being healthier doesn't mean giving up all the things that bring you great pleasure, whether it's eating potato chips, baking chocolate chip cookies or watching a favorite sit-com. In fact, that's *not* very healthy!

But people can learn to make the kinds of choices that allow them to have more variety overall. If you crave potato chips, add a few carrot sticks to the mix. If you love watching re-runs of *I Love Lucy*, find something physical to do before or after the show.

The principle of adding things you enjoy, rather than depriving yourself of things you want, works well for adults who are changing fitness behaviors. It's a good approach with kids, too, to help them learn healthy behaviors right from the start.

## **Notice, Respect and Enjoy Your Body**

Helping kids enjoy the wonder and pleasure of having a physical body is hard to do if they're spaced out in front of the TV for hours every day, or never move their bodies in enjoyable ways, or don't know what it's like to have a nutritious breakfast.

Many of these practices occur within the family, and teachers have little power to change them. But teachers can bring a conscious awareness of the physical body into the classroom. What did it feel like getting to class that morning? (cold? hot? windy? wet?) How do students feel after working on their math problems for 25 minutes? (restless? bored? happy? excited? tired?) How would 5 minutes of stretching feel right now? (great!)

These kinds of awareness exercises can be used after P.E. classes, before and after a class play, before and after a big test, or any time something exciting, scary, funny or surprising happens in class. Cultivating awareness of physical sensations will help students tune in to messages from their bodies to move, drink water, rest, get a hug or breathe deeply—all great lessons to learn!

## **From Mind to Body: Anchoring the Learning**

In teaching about healthy eating, physical activity and body image, you need to find ways to engage students and to make the learning solid and meaningful. You want to present information that will intrigue them—the ideas, facts and attitudes behind the subject. This is the “mind” part of learning, a standard approach to all kinds of teaching.

Students can learn the details—how muscles work, what a calorie is, what makes broccoli green. They can hear big ideas or recommendations—how important it is to eat a varied diet with lots of fruits and vegetables in it. They can apply their own creative thinking—coming up with recommendations for getting kids their age to eat more fruits or be more active.

You also want to give them physical experiences that reinforce what their minds are exploring. This is the “body” part of the learning. Particularly because the concepts of nutrition and fitness have physical effects, teachers can use the body itself to help make the learning powerful and exciting.

Whenever possible, give students a chance to further explore an intellectual idea in some physical way. Help them experience it in their bodies or see it at work in the world around them. How do they feel physically when they choose nutritious foods? What’s it like to eat crunchy vegetables? How do their muscles feel when they are tired, tense or relaxed? What food choices do they see being made around them?

Finally, it’s important to provide plenty of positive reinforcement or “encouragement” for the mind and body learning your students are doing.

Think about how you can teach about physical activity, healthy eating and body image in ways that include mind, body and encouragement. You know what will work with your students—what would be fun, give them opportunities for mastery, build

self-esteem and self-efficacy, and help them practice and experience the respect of their peers. **Here are some ideas to get you started.**

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## Enjoying Physical Activity

### Mind:

- ◆ How people grow.
- ◆ How muscles work.
- ◆ How the body heals.
- ◆ What bones are made of.
- ◆ What nerves are.
- ◆ How blood carries oxygen through the body.
- ◆ Ways to play smart and avoid injuries.
- ◆ Respecting differences in skill and ability.
- ◆ Why physical activity is good for everyone.

### Body:

- ◆ Do fun physical activities.
- ◆ Make growth charts.
- ◆ Help students notice how muscles feel (stretching, lifting light and then heavy objects, doing aerobic activities such as walking or running).
- ◆ Have students feel how hard the heart beats after running. Show them how to measure pulse rate.
- ◆ Pay attention to all kinds of physical sensations (heat, cold, hearing music, seeing color, tasting something delicious, pain, smooth, rough, drinking cold water).
- ◆ Ask students to notice how emotions affect the body. (What does the body feel when they are happy? sad? scared? angry? etc.).

- ◆ Encourage students to try 3 activities and choose the one they like best.
- ◆ Identify physical sensations students enjoy feeling during physical activity and after being active.

**Encouragement:**

- ◆ Emphasize fun over competition.
- ◆ Connect students with local recreation programs for after school activity and socializing.
- ◆ Use physical activity as a reward for good behavior and achievement.
- ◆ Allow students to help make decisions about class activities.
- ◆ Validate and confirm students' efforts and enjoyment.
- ◆ Be a role model. Do a physical activity you enjoy, and talk about it with students.

**Remember the Sunscreen!**

It's important for children to use sunscreen when being active outdoors. This establishes a healthy habit early in life. Sunscreen also protects children from the dangers of sun exposure during the years when they are most vulnerable to the skin changes that can lead to cancer as an adult.

Health experts recommend that children use sunscreen with a protective rating of SPF 15 or higher. Check your school or district policies regarding use of sunscreen. You may need to obtain parent permission slips to apply sunscreen at school, or to allow children to keep their own sunscreen in backpacks or desks.

Most children enjoy being outdoors. It provides added pleasure to many physical activities. Sunscreen supports children's comfort and safety while they have fun being active outside.

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## Nutrition and Eating Well

### Mind:

- ◆ Different kinds of food and food groups.
- ◆ How food nourishes the body.
- ◆ The meaning of “diet”—a way of eating, not a way of losing weight.
- ◆ What fat is and why people need some of it in their diet.
- ◆ How to identify favorite foods.
- ◆ Foods and families, different cultures, food’s role in celebrations.
- ◆ The importance of breakfast.
- ◆ Choices kids can make about food.
- ◆ Why water is healthy.
- ◆ The importance of whole grains.
- ◆ What nutrients are and what they do for the body.
- ◆ What nutritious foods are.
- ◆ Body signals of hungry, satiated and full.
- ◆ How to think critically about TV advertising.

### Great Words for Healthy Choices

Language can help students appreciate some of the attractive features of foods that are part of a healthy diet. When you talk about whole-grain foods, fresh fruits and vegetables, water, or variety you might use words such as these:

- |           |                     |
|-----------|---------------------|
| ▪ crunchy | ▪ juicy             |
| ▪ chewy   | ▪ refreshing        |
| ▪ fresh   | ▪ pure              |
| ▪ crisp   | ▪ new and different |

**Body:**

- ◆ Offer opportunities to try nutritious foods with different flavors and textures.
- ◆ Introduce new foods.
- ◆ Allow students to make choices (favorites from 3 new foods; when to have a snack; what to have for a class snack; a new food to try).
- ◆ Encourage students to drink water (during class; over the course of a week, keeping track on a chart; instead of drinking a soda or sweetened drink).
- ◆ Ask students to notice how they feel and what they think after watching TV ads for snack foods or sweetened cereals.
- ◆ Keep track of choices (fruits and vegetables eaten each day; glasses of water drunk; “more of this, less of that” choices).
- ◆ Make class or small group suggestions to school food services about menu items students would like best.
- ◆ Point out how the body feels when hungry, satiated and full.

**No Bad Foods!**

Many people use terms such as *good* and *bad* foods, or *healthy* and *unhealthy* foods, or *junk food* and *real food*.

It's best to avoid this kind of language with students. Most nutritionists agree there are no “unhealthy” foods, just healthy and unhealthy choices. Even the most cholesterol-laden, fat-filled, decadently rich foods can be part of a healthy diet, as long as they are eaten in small quantities and only occasionally. The key to healthy eating is variety, moderation in some foods, and lots of fruits and vegetables.

Talk about making healthy choices that add foods people enjoy to their diets. This gives both children and adults more opportunities to build mastery, self-esteem and self-efficacy.

- ◆ Ask students to notice how the body feels after different kinds of snacks or meals (rich and sugary snacks vs. fruits and vegetables; drinking milk or water vs. drinking cola).
- ◆ Bring in favorite foods from home for potlucks or celebrations.

**Encouragement:**

- ◆ Model making healthy choices and trying new things.
  - ◆ Be realistic (“more of this, less of that”).
  - ◆ Be sensitive about students’ family situations in setting up class activities (e.g., some kids don’t get breakfast; some can’t bring in food for a class event).
  - ◆ Don’t disparage foods a child’s family chooses. Respect different family and cultural values about food.
  - ◆ Create opportunities in class for students to share food together. (Some children do not have experience with family or community meals.)
  - ◆ Reward or treat students with nutritious foods (not with candy).
  - ◆ Praise students who try new tastes or make nutritious choices.
  - ◆ Link the willingness to try new things to maturity and being more grown up.
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**Building a Positive Body Image**

**Mind:**

- ◆ Appreciating what the body can do physically.
- ◆ Appreciating physical sensations.
- ◆ Everyone grows and changes.
- ◆ Every body is a good body.
- ◆ People look different and this is normal.
- ◆ People can do different things, and everyone has areas of greater or lesser talent.

### Chapter 3

- ◆ How to think critically about media messages.
- ◆ Appreciating diversity.
- ◆ Respecting oneself and others.
- ◆ Respecting and taking care of the body.

#### **Body:**

- ◆ Encourage students to notice pleasant physical sensations, such as how their muscles feel when stretching.
- ◆ Have students move their bodies (in noncompetitive P.E. activities; in music and dance; in getting from one place to another by walking, skating or bicycling).
- ◆ Help students see and appreciate their bodies (name 3 things they like about their bodies; find 3 classmates who have a physical feature similar to one of theirs; find 3 who have a feature different from one of theirs).
- ◆ Do something nice for the body (do an activity students enjoy; eat a nutritious snack; look at something beautiful; listen to favorite music).

#### **Encouragement:**

- ◆ Invite diverse role models into the classroom (as speakers, on posters, in books).
- ◆ Treat all students with respect, and notice each one individually.
- ◆ Intervene swiftly when there is hazing or bullying.
- ◆ Give students opportunities to notice and appreciate things they can do physically.
- ◆ Model acceptance of and comfort with your own body for students.

## Building Media Literacy

Teaching kids how to recognize and critically interpret media messages is a valuable tool in health education. Children who understand how the media tries to influence their choices will be better equipped to deal with a wide range of health decisions today and in the future. The benefits of media literacy are not limited to nutrition, physical activity and body image. Media-smart kids will make better choices about tobacco and other drugs, postponing sexual activity and avoiding risks that can lead to injuries.

Media can be immensely persuasive and powerful for young children. But advertisers assume children are willing to overlook deceit and be tricked by the cleverness of marketing. In truth, most children are deeply committed to honesty and detest being tricked. This is why educating children about media can be so effective.

Activities might explore questions such as how TV makes people feel (passive, accepting, like couch potatoes), what advertisers want to do (get you to buy things), and how movies and videos influence behavior (people want to dress or act like performers they admire). Children can begin to see that media presentations have a particular point of view, and that this view is rarely objective.

Activities that have kids identify tricks and dishonesty used in advertising are usually quite successful. Children can work in teams or as a class to evaluate written, Internet and television advertising. As they become more practiced in these skills, they can do family activities and homework assignments in which they analyze ads on neighborhood billboards or evening TV shows.

An essential part of media literacy is teaching children skills to “talk back” to these messages. Classroom activities could identify ad messages that encourage people to make unhealthy choices, such as eat lots of sweets, watch TV instead of being active, or smoke cigarettes; or messages that might make them feel bad about their bodies because they aren’t thin, young, old or strong enough. Student teams could come up with alternative messages that support healthy choices and a positive body image.

## Common Tricks in Children's Advertising

- **Attractive models.** Advertisers use child actors a little older than their target audience. These are the most persuasive models for children. They are usually handsome, healthy, glowing and unblemished, with nice teeth and stylish clothes.
- **Unreal toys.** Toys are often shown in life-like settings performing amazing feats, when in truth they are objects that must be manipulated entirely by a human being.
- **Emotional needs.** Ads often show idealized family settings that appeal to children—such as parents and kids all getting along cheerfully at the local fast food restaurant. The ads suggest that using the product brings the family together.
- **Celebrities.** Sports stars, singers, actors and animated characters promote cereals, shoes, TV programs and other products. Children may not realize that celebrities receive money to do these ads.
- **Clubs.** Kids like to belong. Internet sites in particular use clubs and contests to give kids a sense of belonging. Kids who sign up may receive small gifts or incentives. The companies get marketing data and addresses for direct mail advertising.
- **Great design.** Ads for kids are done by experts. They use bright colors, fast edits, energetic music, attractive images and other design elements to make the ads compelling and interesting. Many children pay more attention to TV advertising than to the programs themselves.
- **Wow!** In ads, people eating the food, wearing the shoes or playing with the toys are always having a great time. They never seem bored, hurt or in any way discontent. It looks as if the product will bring unending happiness.

# Classroom Activities

The following activities can be used to reinforce the concepts discussed in this chapter. There are also numerous examples on the Internet, and many curricula offer a number of classroom activities that address nutrition, physical activity and body image.

Choose what will work with your students. Adapt materials freely if you have ideas for making the activities more fun. Add your own ideas to help give students opportunities to build mastery, self-esteem and self-efficacy. And don't forget about using the influence of peers to make the learning more powerful and meaningful. The next chapter tells you how.

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## Fun: Time for a Party!

**This activity helps students celebrate and have fun with their learning.**

- After studying nutrition, physical activity and body image, have students plan a party using some of the things they have learned. They can repeat favorite activities from class or develop new ones.
- Break students into 3 groups, with each group assigned to plan one of the following areas (or, with younger students, work with the entire class to plan each of the areas):
  - **Feel and appreciate the body.** Choose a couple of activities that bring attention to body sensations or encourage people to appreciate their unique bodies.
  - **Move the body.** Choose activities that involve moving the body—stretching, walking or dancing would be good ideas.
  - **Feed the body.** Choose several nutritious snacks that everyone can enjoy.

## Mastery: I Can Do That!

**This activity helps promote students' sense of mastery.**

- Describe the 3 kinds of movement that are important to keep bodies healthy:
    - **Aerobic activities**—the body moves and the heart rate increases. (*Examples:* running, walking, dancing, jumping rope, bicycling.)
    - **Stretching**—the muscles are gently stretched and relaxed.
    - **Strength**—the muscles lift or push to build strength. (*Examples:* lifting small weights or heavy objects like books, doing push-ups, climbing on a jungle gym.)
  - Have students name an example of each type of movement that they can do. Older students could write about their choices. Students could also draw pictures of the activities they could do.
  - Take students to a place (a playground, multi-purpose room or open area of the classroom) where they can demonstrate the things they can do.
- 

## Self-Esteem: One New Thing

**This activity helps foster self-esteem and self-efficacy.**

- Gather or locate some interesting sports equipment together in one place. You might have a kickball, a jump rope, a volley ball, a Frisbee, a sponge ball, a softball, a balance beam and a climbing gym.
- Ask students to look at the equipment and think of something they have *never* done with one of these items. Perhaps they've never rolled a volley ball down a leg, or kicked a softball, or crawled along a balance beam on their hands and knees.
- Have each student name that new thing and then try it

(assuming, of course, it is safe for them to do). Praise each student for creating a new activity and trying it, no matter how the experiment goes.

- Ask students to talk about why it's a good idea sometimes to try things you're not sure you can do.

## Respect: We're a Team

**This activity helps build respect and students' sense of community.**

- Break students into small groups of 4–5. (With younger children, you might do this as a full group.)
- Ask groups to come up with a list of 5 things all the members have in common. Suggest possibilities, such as clothing items, likes and dislikes, having pets, living in the same town or neighborhood, having parents.
- Then have groups identify one unique quality of each person in the group.
- Have groups report back to the class and present their lists.
- In a class discussion, ask students what they think about the fact that they share many things in common with their classmates. What do they think about the fact that there are things about each person that are unique?

## Jump Rope for Heart

**Jump Rope for Heart is an educational fundraising event that is held successfully each year in thousands of elementary schools across the nation.**

It is cosponsored by the American Heart Association (AHA) and the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (AAHPERD).

*(continued)*

- Students ask family, neighbors and friends to sponsor their efforts to learn a series of skills at jump rope.
- Schools teach children about health and fitness and everyone gets a chance to engage in regular physical activity while practicing jump rope skills for the event.
- Participants collect pledges for success in individual and team skills (moves like “the skier,” “the criss cross,” “the twist” and “the can-can”). Monies raised support education and research on heart disease in the students’ own communities.

(See the Resources section for contact information for the American Heart Association.)

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## People Can Move More, Sit Less

**This activity helps students think about ways to increase physical activity.**

- Read the class the following short vignette:  
*Linda is 6 years old. She and her mother have walked to the bus stop. The bus is late and Linda is bored.*
- Ask students to suggest some ways Linda could move more and sit less while waiting for the bus. Are there ways she could get her mother involved?
- Tell some other vignettes, using characters of different ages. Be sure to include some characters the same age as your students. Ideas include:
  - Watching a favorite TV program
  - Standing in line at the grocery store
  - Reading a book at the library
  - Hanging out on some steps, waiting to meet a friend
  - Just after lunch with 20 minutes before class starts again
  - Playing a computer game

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## The Wall Walk

**This activity allows students to experience success in an easy physical activity.**

- Have students make markers for the Wall Walk. They could draw a foot, make an outline of their own shoes, or use other images that suggest movement and vigor. Make a marker for yourself, too.
  - Make a line graph numbered from 1 to 50, and post it on the classroom wall. Tell students the class will use the graph to measure the number of times they have walked the circumference of the playground.
  - Have everyone post a marker at the starting edge of the graph.
  - Take the full class out for a walk along the route you would like them to follow. Repeat the route if you have time.
  - When you go back to the classroom, have students move their markers to the appropriate point on the graph to show how many times they walked around the playground.
  - Have students continue to move their markers along and show their progress over the next few weeks. Encourage them to take walks on their own before or after school, or during recess. Take group walks as a class when you can.
  - Ask students to tally the total number of laps each day and each week. You might mark the end of the activity by having a special celebration (nutritious snacks? a final group walk around the playground? a dance party?) or writing a class letter to the principal that describes the activity and announces the total number of laps completed by the class.
-

## Our Favorite Walk

**This activity encourages students to share their enjoyment of physical activity.**

- Take the class on several walks around the playground or school neighborhood over a 1-week period.
  - At the end of the week, have small groups draw the route of their favorite walk. Students might also draw a picture and write an essay about something they liked about this walking route.
  - Have small groups share their routes with the class and describe why this walk was their favorite.
- 

## Walk and Talk

**This activity gives teachers a chance to know students on a different level, and models some of the social benefits people gain through physical activity.**

- Set up a system where students can sign up for a walk with their teacher before or after school.
  - Keep the number of students on the walk small (4 or 5 is a good number) so the chance to participate is seen as a privilege.
- 

## Eating with Fingers

**This activity combines teaching about different cultures, food habits, nutrition and trying out new things.**

- Explain to students that in many cultures, people eat with their fingers. Plan a special meal or snack based on some of these traditions. Children enjoy the novelty of being encouraged to eat

with their fingers and may be more enthusiastic about trying out some new tastes.

- Have a tasting party of finger foods. You might include foods from Pacific Island cultures, India, Southern Asia, the Middle and Near East, Africa, or Native American cultures in North and South America.
  - Talk with students about rules of courtesy in the cultures you are studying (in some cultures, eating only with the right hand; in others, using breads to scoop up foods so they don't come into direct contact with the fingers; in others, not letting the fingers touch the mouth).
  - Be sure everyone's hands are washed before eating.
- 

## Taste Tests

**Taste tests are a good way to talk about nutrition, healthy choices and trying new things.**

- Some foods your students might enjoy tasting:
    - 3 different kinds of apples
    - 3 different kinds of pears
    - apples compared with pears
    - raisins, dried apricots, dried cranberries
    - oranges compared with tangerines
    - baby carrots, celery, green or red peppers
    - 2 kinds of whole-grain snacks (rice cakes, whole-wheat crackers)
    - 3 kinds of whole-grain cereals, tasted dry
    - 2% milk and 1% milk
-

## Delicious Snacks

**This activity affirms students' healthy food choices.**

- Have students work in small groups to come up with a list of nutritious snacks kids love to eat.
  - Have each small group suggest one of their snacks for a class “master list.” Write suggestions on the board until you have a list of about 10 snacks.
  - Put the list in a form students can take home to their families. For example:
    - Type the list yourself and photocopy it.
    - Have students with computer skills enter the list on a word-processing program, and make copies for all students.
    - Ask students to make their own lists based on the class suggestions.
  - On their copies of the final list, tell students to put stars next to the 3 snacks they like best.
- 

## Here and There, Then and Now

**This activity helps students analyze how standards of physical beauty change depending on time and place.**

- Gather together a range of images of people from different times and places. You might use art books, history texts or magazines that show people from different cultures.
- Ask students to look at these resources and identify the features that are considered beautiful in these different times and places (curly hair, little feet, big moustaches, full beards, full figures, gaps in teeth, tattoos, dark skin, light skin).
- Then have students look at modern fashion magazines and do a similar analysis. What qualities are considered beautiful by these

magazines? Students will probably notice things such as being thin or tall, or dressing in expensive clothes. Ask them why they think these qualities are considered beautiful by the magazines.

- Ask students to imagine what might be considered beautiful in the year 2025. Have them draw pictures of their ideas.
  - You might also ask students to draw pictures of what they consider beautiful right now in their class.
- 

## The Amazing Body

**This activity helps students appreciate their amazing bodies.**

- Tell students they are going to take a few moments to think about some of the things their bodies can do.
- Have them stand at their desks and take a breath. Ask them to hold it for as long as they can. After 30 seconds or so, tell everyone to go ahead and exhale if they haven't already.
- Talk about how the body takes oxygen from the air and puts it into the blood to stay alert, healthy and energized (not to mention alive!). The body does this 10–15 times a minute, 600 times an hour, 15,000 times a day, without a person even thinking about it.
- Do similar exercises asking students to:
  - Feel the heart beat.
  - Hold their arms out straight from the body and feel the pull of gravity after 30 seconds or a minute.
  - Balance on both feet and then on one foot.

In each case, talk about the amazing feats of strength, balance, endurance or complexity that are being performed by the body.

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## I'll Be Good to This Body

**This activity encourages students to take care of their bodies.**

- Ask students to think about some of the ways people take care of their bodies. They might mention things such as eating well, brushing teeth, drinking lots of water, avoiding injury or being active.
  - Explain that doing things that feel good is a way of taking care of the body, too. Ask them what are some things that feel good to their bodies. (You might start out with some suggestions: Does it feel good to snuggle up with a pet? to walk barefoot on grass? to jump up and down? to get a hug from someone? to giggle? to stretch?)
  - After several suggestions have been made, ask students to think of something simple they could do right now that would feel good to their bodies. Ask students to share some of their ideas. Choose one or two student suggestions and ask everyone to join in (e.g., “Let’s all take a moment and stretch our bodies. Doesn’t that feel great?”).
  - Encourage students to do 3 things that feel good to their bodies over the rest of the day.
-

## Media Point of View

**This activity helps students “talk back” to misleading media messages.**

- Collect several magazine advertisements for sweet foods, especially ads aimed at children (or have students bring in ads). As a class, identify some of the tricks the advertisers use to persuade people to buy their products.
  - Have students think about some healthy messages about eating. These might include “Drink lots of water,” or “Eat fruits and vegetables for snacks.”
  - In teams, ask students to create ads that promote healthy messages about eating. Ask them to think about how they are going to get people to believe their message. They can use the same kinds of tricks advertisers use, but use them in ways that promote good health.
  - Have teams present their ads to the class. Then post the ads around the classroom or school.
-

# 4 Shaping Peer Norms

**Y**our students' ideas about food and activity are being influenced by many factors beyond the classroom. Their vulnerable, receptive brains are practically pummeled by advertising, television commercials, popular music, movies and magazines spewing forth damaging ideas: Fast food is desirable. Sweet cereals are the best. Soda is good. Fat people are bad. Zoning out in front of a screen is the natural thing for kids to do.

Of course, these aren't the only things influencing kids' attitudes. Some family patterns may favor less healthy choices. Children may participate in community programs that provide less nutritious foods (e.g., candy bars after the soccer game). Their schools may have cut the time allowed for recess and physical education.

It's not surprising if your students want to eat gimmicky foods such as squeezable yogurt or fruit roll-ups. It's understandable if they groan at the thought of being physically active. There's a painful logic behind disparaging remarks they may make about their own or others' appearance or physical abilities.

Fortunately, teachers have a resource at hand that can be a formidable opponent of those forces moving children away from fitness and good nutrition—the powerful process of peer influence. Kids want to belong. They want to look good to their peers. They like to feel like they're a little ahead of the curve on trendy ideas and behaviors. They thrive when they're given opportunities to join, to lead, to affirm themselves and others in groups.

Identifying and shaping peer norms is one of the most effective ways to influence *any* health behavior. It's an ideal focus when addressing healthy eating, physical activity and body image.

## Values and Norms

Two factors are especially useful to keep in mind when using the force of peers for good: *values* and *norms*.

*Values* are personal beliefs or judgments about what matters in the world. Values guide a person's behavior based on a sense of what is right, what is important, and what is meaningful. Why spend time on something? Why is something worth taking a risk for? Why make an effort to achieve something? Because of values.

Children learn their earliest and strongest values from their families. Some come from direct teaching—parents telling a child not to waste food, for example. But a great deal come from the unstated values children see enacted in family behaviors. They might learn they have important roles and responsibilities in their family through helping to prepare family meals. They might develop values of respect for themselves and others because they are treated respectfully by parents and older siblings.

Once children begin to attend school, they are exposed to entirely new sets of values. Their teachers, school culture, peers and peers' families may have other ideas about how things are supposed to be done. Part of the excitement of working with elementary school students is watching the ways they think about and cope with all these new values. Some values intrigue them; others challenge them. They willingly adopt some new ideas, and remain steadily resistant to others. It's a time of exploration and discovery. One of the greatest new influences on children is what they believe their peers value. This brings us to the idea of norms.

*Norms* are the beliefs and behaviors shared by and accepted within a group of people. In your school, for example, it may be the norm for children to line up in boys' and girls' lines after the recess bell rings. A child who didn't follow that norm would stand out and be noticed. Norms are very powerful, because children tend to be uncomfortable with being different.

You can usually find a value behind a norm. Children who line up “properly” at the recess bell, for example, are expressing values about obedience, meeting their teachers’ expectations and doing what the other kids do.

Children (and adults) make a lot of their choices based on their *perception* of social norms. You may have done this yourself at a social event—perhaps a party—where you wanted to make a good impression. You looked for signals about what behaviors were appropriate when. Is it OK to go right to the food table, or is this one of those events where people pick at the buffet but don’t really eat much? Can you sing along with the piano player, or is it more appropriate to listen quietly? Will people judge you if you have a glass of wine? Will they suspect you are dull if you ask for mineral water?

*Perceived norms* are extremely persuasive, even when they are inaccurate or inconsistent with actual community behaviors. For example, if children *perceive* that most of their peers are eating cocoa-covered cereal with marshmallows, their own bowls of plain oatmeal pale sadly in comparison. Imagine an entire community of suffering 7 year olds moping over oatmeal in the mistaken belief that they alone, amongst all their peers, must eat something nutritious for breakfast.

Of course, this suggests another possibility. Could you possibly persuade all those 7 year olds that oatmeal *is* the desirable norm? That the coolest kids eat whole grains every morning? That there’s nothing quite so satisfying as a delicious, fiber-filled bowl of oats? The answer is yes!

## Strategies That Work

There are some very specific strategies for influencing students to practice healthy behaviors. No approach will be 100% effective, but research has proven that kids’ behaviors *are* influenced by their peers. With a little thought, teachers can steer that influence to the good.

**Here are some strategies that work:**

- ♦ **Identify values** among students that support healthy behaviors.
- ♦ **Have students practice** behaviors that express these values.
- ♦ **Let students see their peers** practicing these behaviors and expressing these values.
- ♦ **Comment explicitly** on this process, and have students do the same.

## **Identifying Kids' Natural Values**

Nobody agrees on everything, but a surprising number of values are nearly universal among young children. One of the ways to strengthen your teaching with peers is to work with values your students are likely to share. You will not have to persuade them to join with something they already believe in.

Here are some values most children hold that can be useful in efforts to encourage healthy choices. Which of these are things your students believe?

- ♦ Doing stuff is cool.
- ♦ I like adventure!
- ♦ Being with others feels good.
- ♦ Sensations are interesting.
- ♦ It feels good to belong in a family or community.
- ♦ It's great to have a brain that works.
- ♦ Being manipulated is *not* cool.
- ♦ I like to be responsible.
- ♦ I like to be respected and to respect others.
- ♦ I like showing younger kids how grown up I am.

It's also important to have a classroom and school where differences between people are recognized and respected, rules and

behaviors reflect this quality of respect for diversity, and students have chances to express their own commitment to these principles. In this environment, students will be less likely to tease others for appearance, including things like weight, size, ethnicity or style of dress. There is a clear understanding that everyone has something to contribute to the community.

## **Practicing Behaviors That Express Values**

When you link values to peer activities, you can help students express their values through behaviors. When they do this in a community—their classroom—they will accept these behaviors as norms.

**There are 8 specific strategies that can help peers link healthy values to healthy norms:**

- 1. Think**, learn and solve problems together (“mind” learning).
- 2. Experience**, observe and reinforce learning together (“body” learning).
- 3. State attitudes** and commitments to peers.
- 4. Hear others** state their attitudes and commitments.
- 5. Practice skills** together and coach each other.
- 6. Demonstrate skills** and successes before peers.
- 7. Receive recognition** before peers.
- 8. State attitudes** and commitments as a group to the larger community.

You can use these strategies in classroom activities to support your students in making healthy choices. Students can work in all kinds of peer group combinations. You can put them in small or large groups. They can be part of an ongoing work group, or meet on a one-time basis. They might meet with their 3 best friends or with a couple of other students they don’t know well.

In fact, it's ideal if you can provide all of these kinds of peer experiences. Different students learn different things in different group combinations. They may be stronger in one group, and more of a follower in another. They might be influenced by a close friend in one behavior and by a less familiar peer in another. They might feel a commitment most strongly when they state it before a few people, or before the rapt gaze of an entire class or assembly.

## Using the Strategies to Shape Healthy Norms

The following examples show just a few of the ways to use the 8 strategies to link students' values to behaviors that will build strong and positive peer norms. The possibilities are endless. Each example lists the values drawn upon and some norms demonstrated concerning physical activity, nutrition and body image.

These lists are not absolute. Depending on how you work with an activity, you might link *any* of these 8 strategies with any of the values listed, or with others. You might come up with other norms your students could demonstrate. Use these examples to generate ideas about what will work with *your* students.

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## Think, Learn and Solve Problems Together

The third graders have been learning about nutritious foods and the parts of a balanced diet. They've studied the "5-a-day" guideline and worked on eating more fruits and vegetables using the principle of "more of this, less of that."

Today, Mr. Campos has them work in small groups to design a healthy meal that kids would really like. When they have finished, each group's menu will go into a booklet for students to take home to their families.

**Values Used:**

- ◆ Doing stuff is cool.
- ◆ Being with others feels good.
- ◆ It's great to have a brain that works.

**Norms Demonstrated:**

- ◆ We make healthy food choices.
- ◆ We like to eat a healthy diet at home.

**Experience, Observe and Reinforce Learning Together**

Ms. Ferrante has her kindergarten class stand very still. She asks them to notice if they can feel their hearts beating. Some of them can feel it a little. Then she has them run quickly all the way around the playground. They come back together and stand still again. Can they feel their hearts beating now?

She asks them to make words or sounds that describe what they feel. “Bam!” “Pow!” “Da-dum, da-dum!” the children call back.

Ms. Ferrante describes how the heart is pumping blood to keep their bodies strong and healthy. They all agree that the body is a wonderful thing.

**Values Used:**

- ◆ Doing stuff is cool.
- ◆ Being with others feels good.
- ◆ Sensations are interesting.

**Norms Demonstrated:**

- ◆ We appreciate our bodies.
- ◆ We enjoy the things our bodies can do.

## **State Attitudes and Commitments to Peers**

The second graders make outline drawings of their bodies on big rolls of paper. Then they color and decorate 3 things they like about their bodies. Sarah spends a lot of time on her eyes. Russell works on his feet. Jordan chooses his hands, his smile and his hair. Then, while a partner holds the drawing up, the artist talks about what he or she likes about the parts that are colored in.

### **Values Used:**

- ◆ Being with others feels good.
- ◆ It feels good to belong in a family or community.
- ◆ I like to be respected and respect others.

### **Norms Demonstrated:**

- ◆ Every body is a good body.
  - ◆ We appreciate our bodies.
- 

## **Hear Others State Their Attitudes and Commitments**

Mrs. Crispin's first grade class includes children of many different cultures. She asks them to draw pictures of a family celebration that includes special foods. Then students show their pictures and talk about some of the foods they celebrate with. After everyone shares, students draw pictures of a new food they heard about that they would like to try.

### **Values Used:**

- ◆ Being with others feels good.
- ◆ I like adventure!
- ◆ It feels good to belong in a family or community.

**Norms Demonstrated:**

- ◆ We like to try new foods.

---

## **Practice Skills Together and Coach Each Other**

Mr. Parker's fourth graders are outside working on "fours." He's divided them into teams of four. Each team gets a volleyball. Their goal is to keep it aloft for 40 seconds. Mr. Parker encourages them to try different strategies and techniques. At the end of the period, each team makes a list of four things they did to help reach the goal.

**Values Used:**

- ◆ Doing stuff is cool.
- ◆ Being with others feels good.
- ◆ It's great to have a brain that works.

**Norms Demonstrated:**

- ◆ We enjoy the things our bodies can do.
- ◆ We get things done through teamwork.
- ◆ Everyone has something to contribute.

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## **Demonstrate Skills and Successes Before Peers**

Ms. Spencer's second graders have been learning how important it is to drink lots of water. This week they are keeping track of how many glasses they drink each day. Each student has a chart with the 5 days of the school week and drawings of 8 empty glasses for each day. Every time they drink a glass of water, they color in a glass.

At the end of the week, they each write a poem about why they like to drink water. Students show the class their water charts and read their poems.

**Values Used:**

- ◆ Doing stuff is cool.
- ◆ I like to be responsible.

**Norms Demonstrated:**

- ◆ We make healthy choices.
  - ◆ We respect others when they make healthy choices.
- 

**Receive Recognition Before Peers**

The third graders have planned a special field day. In the morning, some outside speakers talked to them about healthy ways to be physically active. In the afternoon, they had a schedule of physical activities, some competitive and some not.

Each student was assigned a secret buddy who noticed what the student did during the planning and on the day of the events. Then each buddy made a special badge of recognition for his or her person. Some of the badges talked about having a great attitude, trying out new things or having lots of fun. Others referred to showing spirit, helping others, or being a great soccer player. At an awards ceremony, every student got a special award from his or her secret buddy.

**Values Used:**

- ◆ Doing stuff is cool.
- ◆ Being with others feels good.
- ◆ It feels good to belong in a family or community.
- ◆ I like to be respected and to respect others.

**Norms Demonstrated:**

- ◆ We treat everyone with respect.
- ◆ Everyone has a place in our community.
- ◆ We notice good work and good deeds.

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## State Attitudes and Commitments as a Group to the Larger Community

Ms. Fujita's fourth grade class has been working on a schoolwide campaign to get younger students to eat more vegetables and fruits. They have worked in small groups to come up with ways to promote their message.

One group did posters that encouraged kids to eat fruits and vegetables. Another group put together a video "TV ad" that encouraged healthy eating. A third group came up with a series of appropriate slogans and put them on paper badges to pass out to younger students. A fourth group made a series of blue ribbons with the slogan "5 today!" that could be given to students who made a commitment to eat 5 servings of fruits and vegetables on a particular day.

One of the best parts of the project was a special lesson the fourth graders developed on the ways TV ads lie to kids about food. They presented their lesson to the second and third grade classes, and then helped the younger students work on posters about how to be smart when they see TV ads.

### Values Used:

- ◆ Doing stuff is cool.
- ◆ Being with others feels good.
- ◆ It feels good to belong to a family or community.
- ◆ Being manipulated is *not* cool.
- ◆ I like showing younger kids how grown up I am.

### Norms Demonstrated:

- ◆ We make smart and healthy choices about food.
- ◆ We support others in making healthy choices.
- ◆ We are good role models for younger kids.

## Peers on Parade

Many things are best learned among peers. It would be hard to learn how to work with a team, how to cooperate with others or how to be a good role model through individually focused lessons. But the peer setting is also a great way for kids to learn about all kinds of other things too.

The reinforcements are powerful, and the ability to embrace healthy values and norms is enhanced. When you use peer approaches to support what students already value and enjoy, you extend the power of your teaching. You can create an environment where your students willingly and enthusiastically choose positive, health-promoting behaviors.

Peer activities also give students a chance to learn something about actual versus perceived norms. **For example:**

- ♦ **Television and magazines** will tell them that preteens want to have waif-like bodies and, by implication, that they should want this too. In peer settings, they can learn that their friends and classmates love having strong, sturdy bodies that can do a lot.
- ♦ **TV ads** will tell them that popular kids drink sodas and sweetened fruit drinks when they're thirsty. In class, they can see that their own peer community loves clear, fresh water, and drinks plenty of it.
- ♦ **Many influences** will tell them that the most entertaining thing to do after school is play a new video game or watch reruns of old sitcoms. In school, they'll have a chance to learn that moving the body physically is a highly gratifying pastime that they and their peers enjoy immensely.

Peer activities are some of the most lasting and powerful teaching you can offer. Positive peer influences are strong enough to fight the pervasive, persuasive messages of the media and rewarding enough to help students make healthy choices that can last a lifetime.

# 5 Information for Teachers

**T**here is so much information available about nutrition and fitness! Just check the details on a food label, or try to figure out the curves on a growth chart. And exactly what are kids supposed to be eating and doing anyway? Does sugar really make them crazy? Is soccer causing irreparable brain damage? It's enough to make a teacher give up before even getting started.

But don't let all the complicated and often conflicting details put you off. Remember that physical activity and healthy nutrition save lives. That's why you care about the choices kids make, and that's why it's so important to help them learn skills that support smart and healthy choices.

Information alone won't change behaviors. What does work is the use of broad concepts that make sense to kids, linked to skills they can practice and learn, especially in the company of peers. Teachers who want to offer these concepts and skills to their students don't need to know 500 facts about food. But they do need a few sound, practical principles that can help them choose lessons wisely and work well with their students.

This chapter outlines what teachers need to know to teach effectively about nutrition, physical activity and body image. Many of these principles are probably already part of your approach to teaching. As you read these suggestions, think about the extent to which they reflect ideas you are currently using, or could begin to use with a few adjustments.

## Making a Personal Connection

Your own experiences are a rich source of ideas and creativity. If you are searching for an example during a lesson, you probably have plenty of material to choose from. You know what works for you, and what doesn't. If a recommendation you come across seems irrelevant, it's probably going to strike your students the same way. If an idea really motivates you in a powerful way, there's a good chance it could do the same for your students.

## Explore Your Own Commitment

Start by reflecting on your own commitment to good nutrition, physical activity and a positive body image. How important do you feel these are for your students? How important are they in your own life? for your family and friends?

There are *lots* of good reasons for choosing healthy eating and physical activity—better health, better energy, more stamina, longer life. It will also help you be a better teacher!

## Consider the Personal Benefits

You know what your students will get when they live a healthier, more fit lifestyle. What do you get by bringing this kind of focus to your teaching?

- ◆ When your students are well nourished, they'll think better and last longer. They'll have better academic success.
- ◆ When your students have a chance to be active during recess or breaks, they'll be more focused and attentive during classroom lessons. There will be fewer discipline problems.
- ◆ Students with ADHD or other attention problems will do better when they have regular opportunities to be active and release physical tension.
- ◆ When your students feel good about their bodies and what they

can do, they'll bring a more comfortable quality of inquiry to all of their learning. They'll get along better with peers. High self-esteem will help them be happier and more effective learners.

Remembering all of the benefits you gain as a teacher when you help your students be fit and well nourished can inspire and motivate you.

## **Be a Conscious Role Model**

You are one of the most important adults in your students' lives. Your opinions and attitudes matter to them. They watch your behaviors as well as what you say.

- ◆ Do your students see you choosing a healthy afternoon snack such as fresh carrots or rice cakes with peanut butter?
- ◆ Do they notice you joining in the 5-minute morning stretch?
- ◆ Have they seen you walking to school, or moving around the schoolyard on breaks?
- ◆ Do they see you enjoying physical sensations—a great laugh, a fast walk or a juicy peach?

People who choose healthy eating and physical activity (adults as well as kids) usually have someone they admire who has modeled these behaviors in some way. You may be the only positive role model on fitness and nutrition some of your students have, and you can be a powerful one for all of them.

## **Look Honestly at Personal Issues**

Do you feel you *are* a good role model for your students? Some teachers worry that they aren't fit enough, don't eat nutritiously enough, or aren't happy enough with their own bodies to be effective role models. Some are dealing with health problems related to poor diet, poor fitness or obesity. Some teachers suffer emotional consequences of these conditions as well, including low self-esteem, depression and disordered eating.

These are difficult personal circumstances, but your strategy as a teacher remains straightforward—to be honest about your concerns and efforts. The same principles you’re promoting for your students work for adults, too: Move more, sit less. Eat lots of fruits and vegetables. Drink lots of water. More of this, less of that. Let your students see you doing these things.

Your students are watching the *choices* you make. When they see you putting these principles into practice, the effects are powerful. They’re seeing the effort you put to it. What will impress them is that you value being active and making healthy food choices. What they’ll remember is that you notice and enjoy the physical sensations that come with having a body. That’s where the learning is, and that’s what they’ll want to emulate.

## Knowing the Important Facts

There’s a great deal you could learn about nutrition and fitness, and there are countless sources of information available—on the Internet, in textbooks and in guides for teachers or parents. These resources can help you plan lessons on how the body digests food, or what makes muscles work, or how the apples your students are eating this morning will be transformed into energy this afternoon. Much of this will be of interest to your students. The Resources section suggests additional materials that include this kind of data.

But this is not the information that is most essential in working on fitness and nutrition with children. For that, you can rely on more basic information. **Here are some of the most useful things to know.**

### What to Know About Nutrition

- ♦ **Water.** Elementary school students should drink 6–8 glasses of water a day. They should drink more when the weather is hot, or when they’re very active and losing fluids through perspiration.

- ◆ **Protein.** Most children get sufficient amounts of protein in their diets. For many Americans, the greater health threat is eating too much protein, which can contribute to kidney disease, osteoporosis and, if the proteins come from meat, a high-fat diet. Children in elementary school require 22–28 grams of protein a day. They would get more than this if they ate a peanut butter sandwich, a serving of macaroni and cheese and a glass of milk over the course of a day.
- ◆ **Carbohydrates.** Children should get about half of their calories from carbohydrates found in vegetables and starchy foods such as whole-grain breads, cereals, pasta, beans, rice or potatoes. Carbohydrates provide fuel that the body converts easily to energy.
- ◆ **Vitamins and minerals.** Children will obtain recommended amounts of vitamins and minerals if they eat the minimum number of servings recommended in the Food Guide Pyramid (see Appendix B).
- ◆ **Fiber.** Children, like adults, gain important benefits from dietary fiber, the part of foods that cannot be digested by humans. High amounts of fiber are found in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, beans and legumes. Sufficient fiber can help prevent constipation and obesity, promote normal bowel function, and lower the risk of developing diabetes or cardiovascular disease in adulthood. Health experts recommend that children over age 2 eat grams of fiber totaling their age plus 5 every day. This means a 6 year old would aim for 11 grams of fiber a day. Adults should eat 20–35 grams a day.
- ◆ **Fruits and vegetables.** These foods make great snacks, are excellent additions to meals, and form an essential part of a healthy diet. “Five a day” is a good goal, but for many children starting out with one or two a day is more realistic. In some cases, anything more than zero is an improvement.
- ◆ **Calcium and dairy foods.** Dairy foods provide calcium, protein and other vitamins and minerals. Most children should have 2–3 servings of dairy foods a day. Low-fat and nonfat

products are best for children over age 2. It's important to find alternative sources of calcium, such as green leafy vegetables or calcium-fortified orange juice, for children with milk allergies.

- ♦ **Breakfast.** Breakfast really *is* important. Kids who eat breakfast perform better in school. Some children (and adults) have a hard time eating first thing in the morning. For these people, it's a good idea to pack something to eat later at school or work—a granola bar and some juice, a little yogurt, or a small bag of dry, whole-grain cereal.

## What Is a Nutritious Food?

Nutritious food is food with “high nutrient density,” which means you get a good exchange of nutritional benefits for the number of calories in the food. Nonfat milk, for example, provides a lot of

### Simple and Complex Carbohydrates

Carbohydrates are the starches and sugars found in vegetables, fruits, grains, milk and legumes.

- **Simple carbohydrates** are found in sweet foods such as table sugar, syrups, honey and fruit. The body can break these foods down quickly and send a rush of energy to the bloodstream, followed a little later by a drop in energy.
- **Complex carbohydrates** are found in grains, legumes and vegetables. These take longer to break down and provide a more steady source of energy. For many people, this translates into greater alertness and concentration over the course of the day.

In a well-balanced diet, a mix of simple and complex carbohydrates can be healthful, but it's important to be cautious about the sugars in simple carbohydrates. Ideally, no more than 10% of a healthy diet would come from added sugars (table sugar, syrups or sweeteners). Most carbohydrates would come from vegetables and grains. Most sweets would come from fruits. Such a diet also provides necessary vitamins, minerals and fiber.

calcium and protein for few calories—it's nutrient dense. Extra-rich ice cream might also include calcium and protein, but it has a high fat content and many calories—it has low nutrient density.

Vegetables have lots of carbohydrates, protein, vitamins, minerals and fiber, and no cholesterol or fat—nutrient dense. Fried vegetables often have lost many of their nutritional benefits and have many added calories because of the fats or oils in which they are fried—nutrient poor. Fruits provide fiber and vitamins. Fresh fruits are highly nutritious. Canned fruits in heavy syrup are not.

Whole-grain breads and cereals provide complex carbohydrates, vitamins, minerals and fiber, and few calories—very nutritious. Processed grains, especially when they are sweetened (cereals), fried (donuts), or made with lots of shortening (snack crackers), have much less nutritional value.

## **What About Sugar?**

There is continuing confusion and controversy about the effects of sugar or other additives on children's concentration and behavior. People tend to have very strong beliefs about this issue, but here's what the medical research says:

- ◆ There is no persuasive evidence that sugar causes or contributes to attention disorders, including attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).
- ◆ Scientific studies do not support the idea that food additives, colorings or artificial sweeteners cause or contribute to attention disorders.
- ◆ If parents and educators focus on diet, which is unlikely to help children with attention and hyperactivity problems, they may overlook other steps that could improve the child's status.

Interestingly, many teachers continue to be convinced that certain foods, especially sugars, influence attention, alertness, motivation, concentration and activity level. There is obviously some discrepancy between teachers' experiences and these scientific findings.

While sweets are an enjoyable part of almost everyone's diet, there are some concerns about children who eat large quantities of sugar:

- ♦ Increased risk of cavities.
- ♦ Increased risk of obesity.
- ♦ Children who fill up on sugar may not be eating other, more nutritious foods.
- ♦ Children may have a natural ability to regulate their caloric intake and eat only as much as they need for their growth and activity levels. However, this self-regulation does not operate for many children when they have the chance to freely choose as many sweets as they wish.

### Food Allergies

Greater attention is being paid to food allergies these days. Many parents report that their children are affected and some schools have set restrictions on the kinds of foods students can share with a class or get in the cafeteria because of food allergies.

However, true allergies (food reactions that evoke a response by the immune system) are relatively rare. Seven foods cause 95% of food allergies: milk, soy, fish, wheat, egg, peanuts (a kind of legume, not a true nut) and tree nuts. Other adverse food reactions might be caused by bacteria or viruses, enzyme deficiencies or chemical contaminants.

#### Here are things you'll want to do:

- **Check** your school's policies about foods likely to cause allergies. (Are any restrictions in place?)
- **Know** your school's policies about tracking children who have food allergies. (Is there an effort to identify such children? to inform teachers?)
- **Ask parents** about any food sensitivities or allergies in their children.
- **Ask students** directly about food allergies.

## What to Know About Physical Activity

- ◆ **How much?** The Surgeon General recommends that children and adults engage in moderate physical activity for 30 minutes or more, on most days of the week.
- ◆ **What is it?** Moderate physical activity includes walking, bicycling, skating, dancing, gardening, washing the car, cleaning the garage, running the vacuum or jumping up and down.
- ◆ **Other activities.** It's also a good idea to do stretching exercises and strength-building exercises, such as lifting small weights or doing push-ups, a few times a week.

## Teaching Tips and Strategies

The personal connection you bring to the lessons about nutrition and activity, combined with the facts and guidelines in this chapter, can guide your teaching strategies. The following suggestions will enhance your students' learning and keep the focus on what really counts—helping kids learn skills to choose healthy behaviors.

### Stress Important Concepts

It's easy to bog down in details, especially in an information-rich field such as nutrition and fitness. It helps to remember that the overall behavioral goals are variety and moderation, both in activity and diet.

**Keep these broad concepts in mind as you help your students learn about nutrition and fitness:**

- ◆ Move more, sit less.
- ◆ Find activities you enjoy.
- ◆ Eat fruits and vegetables for snacks.
- ◆ Drink lots of water.
- ◆ Try new things.
- ◆ More of this, less of that.
- ◆ Notice, respect and enjoy your body.

## **Integrate Health Messages Throughout the Curriculum**

Health messages can be woven into all kinds of lessons. Spreading messages across different academic areas strengthens and reinforces them. Using peer-based activities lends even more power to the teaching. **For example:**

- ◆ Are you reading a story where someone has to make a choice? There's a health message there. Are there painful consequences for a poor choice? Is someone able to accomplish something because his or her body is fit and strong? Do diversity, teasing, belonging or acceptance play a role? You can link these stories right back to your lessons about body image, staying fit and choosing nutritious foods.
- ◆ Are you looking for some creative ways to do real-life math problems? How about having students measure their pulse rates and adding up how many times their collective hearts beat a minute?
- ◆ Is your class studying different areas of your state, or different parts of the country? You could use a "Walk Across America" format, where students keep track of how many miles they've walked each week and mark their progress on a map of whatever area they're studying. The combined mileage of a third grade class could really cover some ground!

## **Use Language in Positive and Powerful Ways**

It's no surprise that Americans aren't more enthusiastic about healthy eating and physical activity. The language that exhorts them to exercise is often negative and demanding. Physical activity seems to require discomfort. Healthy food choices threaten to deprive people of foods and tastes they love.

Students hear these kinds of negative messages too. How are they going to know that physical activity feels great and that choosing

healthy eating can be empowering and fun? They will be persuaded by your own modeling and the work they do with peers. The language you use can also help move students in the right direction:

- ◆ Instead of “Don’t eat this or that,” use the rule “More of this, less of that.”
- ◆ Instead of focusing on things to cut out of a diet, focus on tasty things to add to it.
- ◆ Instead of talking about unhealthy foods or junk foods, talk about making healthy choices.
- ◆ Instead of suggesting that they haven’t succeeded in their physical activity regimen unless they have a full 30 minutes of activity on the clock, praise all kinds of choices children make to be active. Even brief periods of activity are important. All those small moments add up, and the health benefit of several short periods is just about as good as one long session of activity.
- ◆ Help children focus on physical sensations and experiences they enjoy to counteract the effect of negative media messages. Use language that emphasizes the delight they can feel in this one great body they’ve been given.

## **Give Meaningful and Creative Rewards**

Behavioral psychologists know that people respond powerfully to something called “intermittent positive reinforcement.” This means that sometimes when they do something well, they receive praise and support for it. Praise at every juncture is actually less effective than this intermittent kind of compliment.

You can probably think of ways to provide such intermittent rewards to students for healthy choices and responsible community behavior. Simple acknowledgment is a good option. Notice and comment on a student drinking water, eating an apple or being active at recess.

Once in a while, a bigger reward can have quite an impact, especially if you offer rewards that have real meaning for kids.

### **Here are some ideas:**

- ♦ **Assign** different students to lead the class in exercises each day.
- ♦ **Join** a small group of students for lunch in the student lunch room (great role modeling!).
- ♦ **Invite** a student to take a walk with the principal.
- ♦ **Reward** students with extra playground time, or the chance to take a longer walk on a class outing.
- ♦ **Acknowledge** students by giving them other kinds of choices that influence class activities. They might choose a nutritious snack for a special event, the dance music for a class party, the game that will be played during P.E., or a special story about physical activity for the class newsletter.

## **Engage Kids' Critical Thinking Skills**

Children enjoy thinking critically. You can help them think about all kinds of things—media messages, peer influences, their own sense of community and family responsibility, what it's like to make a different choice than friends.

### **These strategies support critical thinking:**

- ♦ **Use open-ended questions.**
- ♦ **Ask children to explain** and clarify their ideas.
- ♦ **Help them look at situations** from more than one perspective.
- ♦ **Model critical thinking** by walking them through your own process.
- ♦ **Use positive feedback**, along with suggestions for improvement, rather than blanket criticisms of children's work and behavior.

## **Make Wise Decisions About Competition**

Most children have a naturally competitive spirit. The kids who are winners (at sports, at academics, in the social milieu) are especially likely to enjoy competitive situations.

But a lot of other children suffer in competitive settings. This might include the clumsy child, the small child, the kid who is a little later in physical development, or children who are overweight, slow or simply uninterested in the activity at hand.

Competition has a role in human endeavor, but it's just not useful to create competitive environments for young children when it comes to physical activity. Your goal is to encourage children to choose to be active in an ongoing, lifelong manner—to embrace being active for the rest of their lives. Your chances of success are greatly diminished if the experience of being physically active is fraught with ridicule, disappointment or shame for a significant portion of the children you teach.

If you don't use competitive activities, what can take their place? Learning to support each other in achieving a goal. Competing against oneself by improving performance over time. Problem solving in groups. Enjoying movement together. Reinforcing community values of acceptance and respect. Creating an environment where personal enjoyment for everyone is the overall goal.

And what about the kids who really love competitive sports, those who are athletically gifted and want to work on their gifts? It's easy. Let them work on individual skills and measure their improvement, let them do some one-on-one competitive activities and, most important, refer them to out-of-school programs where their talents can receive attention and be encouraged.

## **Give Smart Grades in P.E.**

Sometimes children are graded in P.E. Classroom teachers may assign the grades or they may be given by a P.E. specialist. It's

important for all teachers who assign grades to make smart choices that support kids' enjoyment of physical activity.

This means giving grades that reward improvement, commitment and willingness, not specific skills or capabilities. It means rewarding kids who enjoy themselves during P.E. and contribute to the sense of community during activities. It means rewarding kids who do activity at home by walking with parents. It means giving kids lots of opportunities to succeed (to have fun, to build mastery, to feel good about themselves and their bodies).

## **Helping Every Kid Succeed**

Children have many different interests and abilities. This becomes even more obvious when you have a group do an activity together. What do you do? Treat them as individuals, certainly, and accept their differences. This provides important role modeling for your entire class.

But there are specific steps you can take to address children's individual needs. It's also important to choose activities that are safe for everyone in a group. For example, smaller children should never have to compete in contact sports with much larger kids, and children who lack coordination should be protected from humiliation and teasing.

You can't provide perfectly matched experiences for all of your students all of the time, but you can offer a variety of experiences that give every child a chance to succeed.

### **Kids Who Are Clumsy or Developmentally Late in Motor Skills**

- ♦ Choose noncompetitive activities that use slow-paced, large motor movements. *Examples:* bouncing large balls, lifting small weights, walking.
- ♦ Measure success by personal improvement.
- ♦ Focus on enjoying movement rather than achieving specific goals.

### **Athletically Gifted Kids**

- ◆ Offer opportunities to compete with others of similar skill.
- ◆ Refer them to out-of-school programs for development of talents.

### **Big Kids (Tall, Heavy)**

- ◆ Team them in pairs or small groups with kids of different sizes—sometimes with kids their size, sometimes with other kids. (If big kids are always matched with other big kids, it can feel like ostracism.)
- ◆ Focus on enjoying movement.
- ◆ Avoid high-impact activities for children who are overweight.
- ◆ Provide opportunities to do activities that involve strategy and thinking, not just brute strength. (Big kids have talents besides their size!)

### **Small Kids**

- ◆ Avoid contact activities (e.g., dodge ball, contact tag) with much larger kids.
- ◆ Use activities that allow them to experience success in the capabilities they do have. These will vary from child to child, but might include balancing, gymnastics, running, walking, dancing, juggling or paddle games (e.g., table tennis, paddle ball).

### **Kids Who Are Physically Challenged or Chronically Ill**

- ◆ Create opportunities to integrate them into group activities.  
*Examples:* cooperative team projects (e.g., a playground treasure hunt), group walks or dancing.
- ◆ Offer sensation activities. *Examples:* holding out your arms and feeling gravity pull them down, noticing the warm sun, drinking a cool glass of water.

### **Kids Who Don't Like Sports**

- ◆ Avoid pressing such children into competitive team activities.

- ♦ Offer individual or small group activities that might be enjoyable. *Examples:* walking, plotting a climbing route on the jungle gym.
- ♦ Try to find connections between physical activities and other interests the child may have. *Examples:* for a social child, being with friends; for a child interested in science, thinking about the ways the laws of physics affect the movement of bodies or playground balls; for a child who loves animals, comparing the ways animals move to the ways people move.

## Do You Know Enough?

Almost certainly, you already have the knowledge and skills to have a real impact on your students' choices and behaviors around physical activity, nutrition and body image. Wondering where you should start? **Use the same approach that helps people make changes in eating habits and physical activity in their personal lives:**

- ♦ **First, notice** what you're already doing and acknowledge it.
- ♦ **Next, think about small steps** you can take that are easy and achievable. Can you have a class discussion about family celebrations and food? Or ask your students to draw pictures of their favorite fruits and vegetables? Give yourself a chance to experience a number of small successes to build your confidence.
- ♦ **Then try something bigger** and more challenging. You might try a noncompetitive team activity with students who are accustomed to more competitive models. You might assign a quieter, less athletically talented child to be a team captain. You might ask students to try a taste test of 3 kinds of apples during class.

Even if one of these bigger steps doesn't feel 100% effective, your students will start to explore some new ideas. They'll begin to think about food and activity and their bodies in new ways. Build on these successes to continue doing more.

Chapter 3 talks about planning memorable experiences for your students by offering activities that are fun, provide chances for mastery, build self-esteem and self-efficacy, and cultivate respect. It's a good idea for lessons about nutrition, physical activity and body image to be memorable for teachers, too.

So, when you think about activities to bring to your classroom, choose ones that sound fun to you. Build your sense of mastery by mixing new ideas and activities with things that are tried and true. Reinforce your sense of self-esteem and self-efficacy by noticing the small steps your students make, talking with colleagues about ideas and experiences, and praising your own dedication to excellent teaching. Your students will benefit, and you will feel their gratitude and respect.

# 6 Making the Family and Parent Connection

**M**any choices children make about eating and physical activity come directly from their family experiences. They eat the foods available in their homes. Their after-school choices to be either active or sedentary have a lot to do with family rules and expectations.

Are they enrolled in an after-school program? Are they allowed to watch afternoon TV? Are they encouraged to entertain themselves on a computer? Children are likely to value healthy choices if their parents do, but may not think about such things if their parents do not.

Families also have a huge influence on children's body image. Do parents admire their little girl's strength and determination, or make comments about their "chubby cherub"? Do they share their son's delight in how great it feels to take a walk in the park, or tell him he should work on his pitching arm and quit "throwing like a girl"?

Do children see books and magazines in the home that show people of many shapes and sizes, or is there an emphasis on publications that feature only thin models? Many parents provide great encouragement and validation to their children around issues of body image. Others want to but aren't sure how. This is why family involvement is such an important part of lessons about nutrition, physical activity and body image.

Teachers can use creative approaches that involve families in the learning. When lessons in the classroom are reinforced through activities in the family, their impact is greater. When families and

schools work together, the outcomes can be very positive. If students can take the new ideas and behaviors they learn at school and put them into practice at home, there's a better chance they'll maintain these healthy habits.

Any school program that wants to have a meaningful impact on children's eating and physical activity will need to use the power and persuasiveness of the family to reinforce teaching. There can be some difficulties in such efforts, of course. Busy parents may not greet family activities with the enthusiasm teachers might hope for. Adults with their own ingrained habits about eating may not want to join their kids in eating more vegetables. Families who have well-established evening TV-viewing habits may not want to try taking a walk or joining a family karate class.

However, with a little planning and some practical strategizing, teachers can choose approaches that work for most families and enhance the learning for all students.

### **What Is a Parent?**

Children may have many adults in their lives filling parental roles. They may have biological, adoptive, step or foster parents. They may have other legal guardians. Some children have older siblings, aunts and uncles, grandparents and family friends who care for and about them and give them support. Some of your students may find parental figures in the leaders of after-school recreation programs or in their teachers.

Children can build a sense of belonging and high self-esteem through many sources. In this chapter, parents are defined in somewhat conventional terms—as adults who hold primary responsibility for the child's well-being—but many other “parents” can also help children be active, make healthy food choices and feel good about their bodies.

## Parents' Concerns

Parents, of course, have their own concerns about school programs that want to influence their children's health behaviors. As you plan classroom lessons or family activities, consider how these might support or challenge parent concerns. **For example:**

- ♦ **Their children's well-being.** Parents want their kids to be healthy, happy and successful in the school environment. They want their children to learn good habits at school. They want them to be safe.
- ♦ **Respect.** Parents support school programs that recognize and validate the importance of family. They like to see new learning integrated with family traditions, rather than having their children completely discard values that are important to the family. They enjoy being admired and respected by their children, and having things to teach them.
- ♦ **No busy work.** Parents hope teachers will have reasonable expectations of them. They want to feel that teachers understand how difficult it is for them to balance the demands of supporting and raising a family. They do not want to be weighed down with a lot of extra work or special tasks for school projects. This is especially true if they do not see something of clear and lasting value coming out of the work.
- ♦ **Comfort.** Parents, just like everyone else, enjoy their comforts. They may not like the idea of changing personal habits, family customs or cultural traditions. If they're going to adjust their thinking or behaviors, they need to believe there are good reasons to do so.

## How Teachers Can Help It Work

When involving families in classroom teaching about nutrition, physical activity and body image, teachers can take some practical

steps to help build family support for the lessons and make the classroom experience more powerful. **Here are some ideas.**

## **Make It Make Sense**

Messages about nutrition and physical activity don't have much chance of succeeding unless they make sense to children and their families. People know that it takes an effort to change eating habits. It takes time to be physically active. Why should families bother doing things in new and different ways?

Be sure parents as well as children understand how important healthy choices about fitness can be. For parents, emphasize the immediate as well as long-range benefits. For example, a child who has eaten a nutritious breakfast will be able to concentrate and learn more effectively at school. If that child goes on to eat nutritiously for a lifetime, he or she is more likely to live longer in better health and with more vigor.

## **Keep Choices Real**

A good way to work with children on nutritional issues is to encourage them to make healthier choices in their everyday lives. Children might draw pictures or fill out charts that show how many times they chose a fruit or vegetable in a day. They might join with their parents in trying fresh fruit for dessert. These are great ideas, but can be challenging for some families.

For example, families in the heart of an urban center may not live near grocery stores that carry fresh produce. Low-income families may not be able to afford many fresh fruits and vegetables, especially during the winter. Some families may not be able to walk safely in their neighborhoods after the parents come home from work.

It's important to have an accurate sense of your students' living situations. Offer choices that are realistic, and try to give students a range of possibilities. Virtually any child can drink more water, for example, but some children might not be able to eat more fruit.

Every child can do stretches and active movement exercises in the home, but some may not be able to take walks or play safely outside.

## **Treat Parents as Allies**

It's also important for parents to feel that they are allies in this learning. One way to build support is to give families easy-to-accomplish activities to start. As parents experience success in their early efforts, they are more likely to bring enthusiasm to the lessons and attempt more demanding tasks.

Start with something simple, such as asking parents to talk with their children about the foods they ate when they were young, or asking parents and children to count how many glasses of water they drink in a day. Based on how these lessons go, you might move into more complex activities, such as trying out 3 healthy new food choices for a week and choosing 1 change to keep permanently.

Whether you are planning family activities, putting together class handouts that parents will see, speaking at family conferences, or offering presentations to parents and the community, some general guidelines will help you establish and maintain a relationship with parents as allies. **These are some good principles to apply:**

- ◆ **Respect diversity.** Show appreciation and respect for differences, including appearance, culture, diet and family traditions. Use materials, language and activities that avoid judgments about body size, weight, ethnicity, physical ability and other differences.
- ◆ **Honor uniqueness.** Recognize special and unique qualities in each student, in each family, and in each class.
- ◆ **Build mastery and self-esteem.** Families, just like individuals, enjoy feelings of mastery, which in turn heighten their sense of esteem as a family unit. Give families lots of opportunities for success and lots of validation for their importance.

## Ideas for Parents

Most parents are happy to help their children make healthier choices about food and physical activity. But many children already have established habits about these things. Parents are not interested in painful power struggles about snacking or watching TV, and teachers, of course, already have plenty to do without getting involved with family disputes about dessert.

Sometimes a few, simple communications with parents can help move the classroom community toward healthier choices. Parent letters, handouts or family activities could include fact sheets or other background information. In schools that have active PTAs or other parent groups, a presentation by a nutritionist or mental health provider might help parents assess their children's eating and learn some strategies for improvement. Your class might put together their own materials for parents—newsletters, lists of healthy snacks kids love, a drawing and written paragraph about delicious vegetables.

**Following are a few examples of simple messages that can be shared with parents.** There are dozens more you might use, depending on your community and your students' interests and experiences.

### Healthy Snacking

- ◆ Snacks are an important source of nutrition for children, so making them nutritious is important.
- ◆ It's OK for kids to snack when hungry. Most kids do best with several small meals a day.
- ◆ Have healthy choices around for after-school snacks, such as carrots, apples, milk or yogurt.
- ◆ Eat moderately at meals.
- ◆ Avoid snacking while watching TV.

## **Favorite Foods**

- ◆ Most adults have favorite foods. Kids do too. Delicious foods are a great pleasure.
- ◆ Eating favorite foods with friends and family is a time-honored way to celebrate.
- ◆ For most children, favorite foods are a good thing to have on occasion.
- ◆ Things can get off track when favorite foods push nutritious foods off the plate.
- ◆ If the favorite food is nutritious (vegetables, fruits, whole grains), a child might be able to eat it every day.
- ◆ If it's nutrition poor (ice cream, potato chips, white bread with butter and sugar), it's best to eat it occasionally and in small amounts.

## **I Hate Vegetables!**

- ◆ Many children do not like vegetables. Some cooked vegetables have strong flavors and smells that are unpleasant for children.
- ◆ Raw vegetables may taste better to kids. Carrots, celery, tomatoes, cucumbers and green or red peppers are great snack foods. They can also make a fun plate at the table. Yogurt dips or peanut butter can make them even more appealing to kids.
- ◆ Some cooked vegetables appeal to children if they are mild in flavor or prepared with sauces. Lots of kids like cooked carrots

### **What's Wrong with TV Snacking?**

It's easy to get used to snacking while watching TV. Children may want to eat meals in front of the TV set, too. Food and TV start to be seen as two things that always go together. Constant food ads only make this worse. Soon, every time kids turn on the TV, they think they're hungry!

tossed with a little oil and brown sugar. Some kids like zucchini, broccoli or green beans with seasoning salt or salsa.

### Food Responsibilities

- ◆ Parents are responsible for choosing and buying a range of nutritious foods for the family. They choose what will be offered at a given meal and how it will be prepared and presented.
- ◆ Children are responsible for how much they eat of the foods that are presented.
- ◆ Parents and children can share responsibilities for preparing a meal and clean-up afterwards.

## Making Family Involvement Fun

Just as fun is a crucial quality in helping kids make healthy choices about nutrition and fitness, the activities that will be most appealing to families will be fun as well. One of the things that can make an activity more attractive is a need to use each family member's ideas and experiences to answer a question or come up with a solution.

### Here are some ideas:

- ◆ **Children and parents might choose** some new and nutritious foods to try for snacks. Based on everyone's preferences, which of these foods would they like to continue to have in the house?
- ◆ **A family might have fresh fruit** for dessert for a week. Each member might choose the fruit for a particular meal, or children and parents together might choose ingredients for a fruit salad.
- ◆ **A family could take several different walks** around their neighborhood over the course of a week. Then they could work together to map out a route they think would be fun for other families to follow.

In each of these examples everyone has something to learn, and based on the experience, everyone has something to contribute to the answers and solutions.

It's also a great idea to use family activities that build cohesion and belonging through telling stories or sharing experiences. What did parents eat on special occasions when they were kids? What are 3 things everyone remembers from the family walk after dinner? What are parents' and children's favorites from the different food groups—fruits? vegetables? grains? dairy?

### **What About Supper?**

**A big cultural shift over the last couple of generations is the move away from family meals.**

Many children do not have a regular meal with family members at any point in the day. Some families have become so accustomed to television as a supper companion, they don't know what to say if they are left in a room together without a TV.

The phasing out of family meal time represents a great loss to many children. In the past, this ritual has helped children learn family and cultural traditions, given them a sense of belonging, taught them important social skills and expectations, and allowed them to take on family responsibilities as they were ready.

**Teachers can offer family activities that encourage families to have meals together and share a sense of connectedness.**

“Table Talk” activities can be successful even for families who have little experience having meals together. Children can take home a “table tent” (standard-size paper folded in half so it stands up on the table like a tent) with questions for family members to discuss during a meal.

The topics of nutrition and physical activity offer many possibilities. Questions could address favorite foods, favorite fruits and vegetables, strategies for drinking lots of water, what each person likes about his or her body, why kids like to move, favorite places to walk, or activities family members love to do.

In the Southwest, many Indian Pueblos are arranging “culture walks,” in which tribal elders walk with children and share stories from history, tales about growing up, and nature facts about the land. Everyone gains the benefit of being physically active, and the children learn more about their culture and history.

Models like this could be effective in many other settings as well. In a city, for example, older adults might have stories to tell of immigration, the changing landscape, the importance of family, or funny events from their own past. Children who walk with older adults in a program like this can gain many physical and social benefits from the experience.

## **Supporting Families**

The best family activities support and validate families as a rich source of ideas, stories, history and traditions that can make children’s classroom learning more relevant and interesting.

### **Family and culture can enrich learning about nutrition:**

- ◆ When students are studying about nutrition and learning to make healthy choices about eating, they can share the favorite foods of their culture.
- ◆ A class might be able to arrange a special potluck event where parents join children for a meal of family favorites.
- ◆ Class cookbooks might include signature foods of the different cultures represented in the classroom.

### **Family and culture can inform lessons about physical activity:**

- ◆ Students might learn folk dances as a way of combining physical activity with lessons about culture.
- ◆ Labor trends over the last couple of generations might be interesting—for example, did students’ grandparents do more physical labor than their parents?

- ◆ Are there family trends in choices for physical activity? Star athletes in a family line? Did anyone in the family ever play stickball?
- ◆ If parents emigrated from another country, did they play different kinds of games and sports than children here do?

**Family and culture can also play a role in learning about body image:**

- ◆ Old family photos might show some of the different things people found attractive 25, 50 or 100 years ago.
- ◆ Students could bring in photos of their parents as children and talk about the ways they look similar to or different from their parents or other relatives.
- ◆ Parents could tell their children about someone they admire, helping children identify features other than appearance or being thin that give people value and worth.

## **Add Things of Value**

The principle that works with children and adults in making changes will work with families, too. When asking a family to make changes, add things of value that support healthy choices, rather than take away cherished behaviors. It's much easier to succeed when a change is enjoyable. Later, after a pattern of success is established, more challenging changes will be possible.

Many elements affect children's choices—media, peers, family and their own individual experiences and preferences. Teachers who appreciate these different influences have the opportunity to plan wisely and have a real impact on their students' learning.

You can recognize and enhance the forces that support healthy choices and join with families and the wider community in helping your students build a value for physical activity and healthy food choices, feel good about their bodies, and grow up strong and healthy for a lifetime.

# Family Activities

The following activities can be used to reinforce the concepts discussed in this chapter. Feel free to adapt activities to suit the needs of your students and their families.

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## Activity Log

**This activity involves families in students' physical fitness efforts.**

- Make a physical activity log for students. The log can include boxes that are checked on days of the week when students have done at least 30 minutes of physical activity.
  - Ask parents to sign the log when it's finished. Include some questions for them to ask their children when they review the log. Examples:
    - What activities did you do?
    - What did you enjoy?
    - What's the best thing about being fit and strong?
    - Are there activities you can keep doing, even though your log is finished?
  - You could do this as a special project for a week, or in an ongoing way over a period of time.
-

## Family Fitness

**This activity provides a chance for everyone in the family to participate and support each other in making healthy choices.**

- Make up a log that has 25 boxes in each of 4 subject areas:
    - Drink 8 glasses of water.
    - Eat 5 fruits or vegetables.
    - Be active for 30 minutes.
    - Say 3 positive things about my body.
  - Ask families to work together to complete the log. Each time someone in the family does one of these things, he or she can check off an appropriate box.
  - Offer prizes or certificates to families when students bring the completed logs back to class.
-

# **Appendix A: CDC Guidelines for Promoting Lifelong Physical Activity**

See the complete Guidelines at the CDC website:  
[www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dash/physact.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dash/physact.htm)

## **Key Principles**

**Physical activity programs for young people are most likely to be effective when they:**

- ◆ Emphasize enjoyable participation in physical activities that are easily done throughout life.
- ◆ Offer a diverse range of noncompetitive and competitive activities appropriate for different ages and abilities.
- ◆ Give young people the skills and confidence they need to be physically active.
- ◆ Promote physical activity through all components of a coordinated school health program and develop links between school and community programs.

## **Recommendations**

**The guidelines include 10 recommendations for ensuring quality physical activity programs:**

- 1. Policy.** Establish policies that promote enjoyable, lifelong physical activity.
  - Schools should require daily physical education and comprehensive health education (including lessons on physical activity) in grades K–12.

- Schools and community organizations should provide adequate funding, equipment and supervision for programs that meet the needs and interests of all students.
- 2. Environment.** Provide physical and social environments that encourage and enable young people to engage in safe and enjoyable physical activity.
- Provide access to safe spaces and facilities and implement measures to prevent activity-related injuries and illnesses.
  - Provide school time, such as recess, for unstructured physical activity such as jumping rope.
  - Discourage the use or withholding of physical activity as punishment.
  - Provide health promotion programs for school faculty and staff.
- 3. Physical education curricula and instruction.** Implement sequential physical education curricula and instruction in grades K–12 that:
- Emphasize enjoyable participation in lifetime physical activities such as walking and dancing, not just competitive sports.
  - Help students develop the knowledge, attitudes and skills they need to adopt and maintain a physically active lifestyle.
  - Follow the National Standards for Physical Education (see Appendix C).
  - Keep students active for most of class time.
- 4. Health education curricula and instruction.** Implement health education curricula that:
- Feature active learning strategies and follow the National Health Education Standards.
  - Help students develop the knowledge, attitudes and skills they need to adopt and maintain a healthy lifestyle.

- 5. Extracurricular activities.** Provide extracurricular physical activity programs that offer diverse, developmentally appropriate activities—both noncompetitive and competitive—for all students.
- 6. Family involvement.** Encourage parents and guardians to support their children’s participation in physical activity, to be physically active role models, and to include physical activity in family events.
- 7. Training.** Provide training to enable teachers, coaches, recreation and health care staff, and other school and community personnel to promote enjoyable, lifelong physical activity among young people.
- 8. Health services.** Assess the physical activity patterns of young people, refer them to appropriate physical activity programs, and advocate for physical activity instruction and programs.
- 9. Community programs.** Provide a range of developmentally appropriate community sports and recreation programs that are attractive to all young people.
- 10. Evaluation.** Regularly evaluate physical activity instruction, programs and facilities.

# Appendix B: The Food Pyramid

## Grains

- Provide lasting energy.
- Eat 6 ounces a day, at least half whole grains.

## Vegetables

- Provide fiber; help the body produce energy.
- Eat 2½ cups a day.

## Fruits

- Provide fiber; help the body produce energy.
- Eat 1½ cups a day.

## Milk

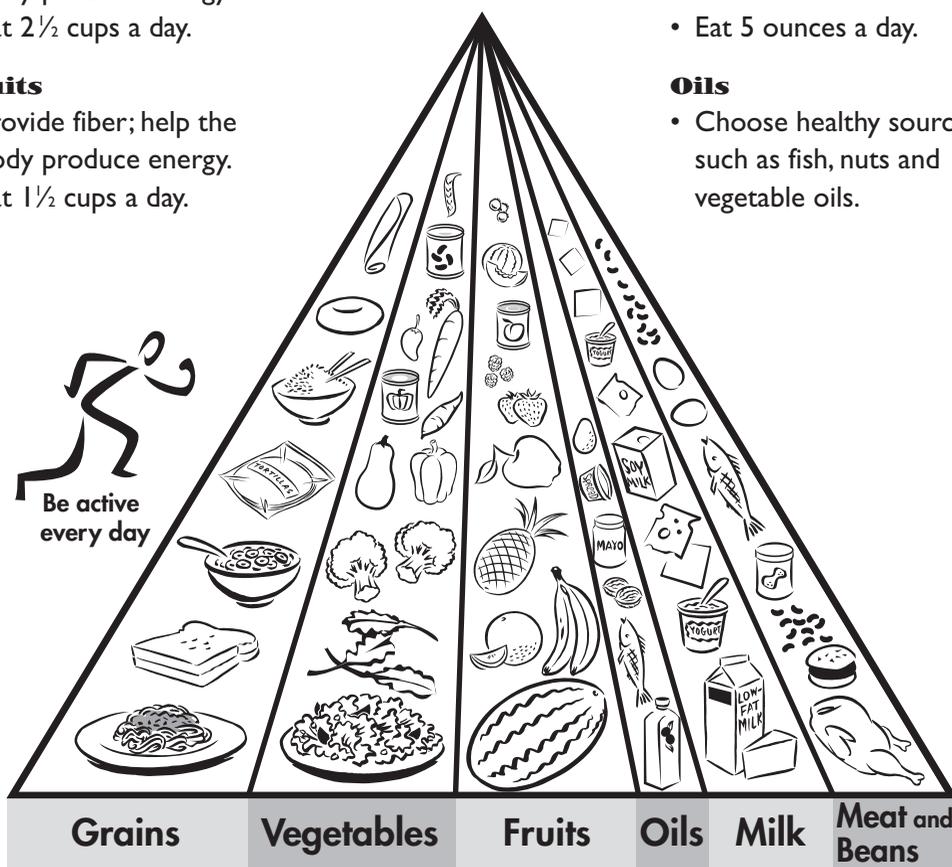
- Helps build strong bones and teeth.
- Have 3 cups a day.

## Meat and Beans

- Help build strong muscles.
- Eat 5 ounces a day.

## Oils

- Choose healthy sources such as fish, nuts and vegetable oils.



*Note:* Amounts are given for an 1,800-calorie diet. Younger or less active children need less food, older, or more active children need more. For specific recommendations based on age, gender and activity level, see the website [www.MyPyramid.gov](http://www.MyPyramid.gov).

# **Appendix C: National Standards for Physical Education**

Reprinted from *Moving into the Future: National Standards for Physical Education* (1995) with permission from the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE), 1900 Association Dr., Reston, VA 20190-1599. See their website at [www.aahperd.org/naspe](http://www.aahperd.org/naspe).

## **The Content Standards in Physical Education**

### **A physically educated student:**

- 1.** Demonstrates competency in many movement forms and proficiency in a few movement forms.
- 2.** Applies movement concepts and principles to the learning and development of motor skills.
- 3.** Exhibits a physically active lifestyle.
- 4.** Achieves and maintains a health-enhancing level of physical fitness.
- 5.** Demonstrates responsible personal and social behavior in physical activity settings.
- 6.** Demonstrates understanding and respect for differences among people in physical activity settings.
- 7.** Understands that physical activity provides opportunities for enjoyment, challenge, self-expression and social interaction.

# **Appendix D: Dietary Guidelines for Americans**

Published by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

- 1. Eat a variety of foods.**
- 2. Balance the foods you eat with daily physical activity.**  
Maintain or improve your weight.
- 3. Choose a diet with plenty of whole-grain products, vegetables and fruits.**
- 4. Choose a diet low in saturated fat, trans fat and cholesterol.**
- 5. Choose a diet moderate in sugars.**
- 6. Choose a diet moderate in salt and sodium.**
- 7. If you drink alcoholic beverages,** do so in moderation.

See a more indepth report on the website at [www.healthierus.gov/dietaryguidelines](http://www.healthierus.gov/dietaryguidelines).

# Appendix E: Curriculum Integration

**H**ere are some ways teaching about nutrition and activity can be integrated across the curriculum. Although this is by no means a comprehensive list, it may identify ways you are already addressing these issues, as well as suggest new approaches that will enhance your teaching.

Subject	Lessons Thematically Related to Nutrition & Activity
Social Studies/ History	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Typical diets in other times and places.</li><li>2. How people in other times and places obtained food.</li><li>3. Different cultural traditions about eating, celebration, being together as families or communities.</li><li>4. Folk dances or physical games from other cultures.</li></ol>
Math	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Use class members' nutrition and activity choices in math problems (glasses of water consumed by the class in one day, number of servings of fruit or vegetables eaten, distances walked, etc.).</li><li>2. Add up and average students' heart rates.</li><li>3. Average the number of steps it takes for everyone in the class to walk down the hallway.</li><li>4. Have students figure out different ways to group food (color, taste, texture, type).</li></ol>

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Lessons Thematically Related to Nutrition &amp; Activity</b>
Language	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Read and discuss stories about decision making, thinking about the future, supporting friends in healthy decisions, body image and diversity.</li> <li>2. Teach communication skills, decision-making skills, and how to talk about feelings.</li> <li>3. Teach media literacy, especially the ways movies, videos and ads contribute to poor choices about nutrition and activity.</li> <li>4. Write about making choices, ways to enjoy movement, favorite foods, or about good things bodies can do.</li> </ol>
Science	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Concepts and terms related to nutrition (fat, nutritious, fiber).</li> <li>2. How food is converted to energy.</li> <li>3. The effects of water on plants and animals.</li> <li>4. How muscles work.</li> </ol>
Community Involvement	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Invite guest speakers who can talk about healthy eating and activity.</li> <li>2. Become involved in community hunger projects, such as food drives or meals for the homeless.</li> <li>3. Have students tutor or teach younger students about making healthy choices, being active, and appreciating the body.</li> <li>4. Share positive health messages with others through writing, posters, wearing badges, making statements in class, or creating public service messages.</li> </ol>

# Resources

## Child Development

Berk, L. 1999. *Infants, Children and Adolescents*. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

College-level textbook on child development addresses cultural and social issues, along with standard emotional, cognitive and physical development. Offers numerous examples and lots of data.

Wood, C. 1997. *Yardsticks: Children in the Classroom Ages 4-14: A Resource for Parents and Teachers*. Greenfield, MA: Northeast Foundation for Children.

Reference for teachers provides a developmental perspective on children in different grades. Covers learning styles, social skills, physical and cognitive capabilities in a succinct and easy-to-use format.

## Physical Activity

Jonas, S., and L. Konner. 1997. *Just the Weight You Are: How to Be Fit and Healthy, Whatever Your Size*. Shelburne, VT: Chapters Publishing, Ltd.

A guide for adults that gives sound and positive recommendations for being fit, staying healthy and enjoying activity.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Division of Nutrition and Physical Activity. 1999. *Promoting*

## Resources

*Physical Activity: A Guide for Community Action.* Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.

Comprehensive guide addresses needs of adults and children. Includes current recommendations for physical activity, research on behavior change and promotion of physical activity, steps for individuals to take to improve personal activity levels, suggestions for teachers and resources.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. 1996. *Physical Activity and Health: A Report of the Surgeon General.* Atlanta, GA.

Information-dense government report pulls together huge amounts of data in a single volume and is a good reference work.

## Nutrition

Bode, J. 1997. *Food Fight: A Guide to Eating Disorders for Preteens and their Parents.* New York: Simon & Schuster.

Interviews reveal various aspects of eating disorders. The first section is directed toward young readers, the second toward adults, and the third lists other helpful resources.

Dietz, W., and L. Stern, eds. 1999. *Guide to Your Child's Nutrition: Making Peace at the Table and Building Healthy Eating Habits for Life.* New York: Villard.

Good all-around guide presented by the American Academy of Pediatrics. Covers nutrition and eating issues from birth through adolescence. Easy to read, with lots of interesting information, including chapters on eating disorders, children's weight and alternative diets.

Kosharek, S. M. 1993. *If Your Child Is Overweight: A Guide for Parents.* Chicago: American Dietetic Association.

Written specifically for parents of overweight children between ages 6 and 12, this booklet takes a practical approach to

improving children's eating habits and promoting a healthier lifestyle.

Mellin, L. 1997. *The Solution: 6 Winning Ways to Permanent Weight Loss*. New York: Regan Books.

Book describes a program that has been successful with adults and adolescents. Looks at 6 different areas that need attention for people to make changes in physical activity and nutrition, including working with body pride, having a rewarding life and knowing how to take care of yourself. Offers good ideas, even if weight loss isn't the goal.

Sizer, F., and E. Whitney. 1997. *Nutrition Concepts and Controversies*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Co.

Textbook designed for nutrition students and educators. Thorough and readable.

Tamborlane, W., ed. 1997. *The Yale Guide to Children's Nutrition*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Guide covers nutrition and eating issues from birth through adolescence. Addresses common concerns, such as weight and obesity, eating disorders and special medical conditions. Includes easy-to-prepare recipes of foods kids like.

## **Body Image**

Berg, F. 1997. *Afraid to Eat: Children and Teens in Weight Crisis*. Hettinger, ND: Healthy Weight Publishing Network.

The editor of *Healthy Weight Journal* writes about the influences that drive kids to disordered eating and suggests solutions.

## **Self-Esteem**

Berne, P., and L. Savary. 1996. *Building Self-Esteem in Children*. New York: Crossroad Publishing.

Narrative book describes the dynamics of healthy self-esteem.

## Resources

Provides pragmatic suggestions for ways to encourage and enhance self-esteem in children. Focuses on ideas for parents, but is useful for teachers and others who work with children as well.

Borba, M. 1989. *Esteem Builders: A K-8 Self-Esteem Curriculum for Improving Student Achievement, Behavior and School Climate*. Torrance, CA: Jalmar Press.

A collection of over 250 activities addressing 5 essential elements of successful self-esteem. Appropriately tailored to students by age levels, based on self-esteem research.

Canfield, J., and H. C. Wells. 1994. *100 Ways to Enhance Self-Concept in the Classroom*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Fun, easy-to-do activities that build self-esteem and a sense of belonging. Some take only moments; others are more indepth.

Khalsa, S. 1996. *Group Exercises for Enhancing Social Skills and Self-Esteem*. Sarasota, FL: Professional Resource Press.

Good ideas and activities. Many involve worksheets and writing better suited to older students, but some can be adapted for younger children.

Seligman, M. 1996. *The Optimistic Child: A Proven Program to Safeguard Children Against Depression and Build Lifelong Resilience*. New York: Harper Perennial.

Written for teachers and parents, reviews Seligman's long-term research on what makes children resilient. Provides clear, research-based rationales for the useful recommendations and suggestions.

## Creating a Positive Classroom Environment

Bukowski, W. M., A. F. Newcomb and W. W. Hartup, eds. 1998. *The Company They Keep: Friendship in Childhood and Adolescence*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Anthology of somewhat scholarly articles about the benefits and mechanisms of children's friendships.

Quiroz, H. C. 1996. *Start with the Kids: 5 Days to Building a Classroom Community*. Santa Cruz, CA: ETR Associates.

Practical and creative strategies to give students a sense of belonging and responsibility.

## Organizations

**American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (AAHPERD)** [www.aahperd.org](http://www.aahperd.org)

Association of professionals in physical education, leisure, fitness, dance and health promotion.

**American Dietetic Association** [www.eatright.org](http://www.eatright.org)

Website offers information, position papers on child nutrition, and links to other sites.

**American Heart Association** [www.americanheart.org](http://www.americanheart.org)

Provides nutrition and fitness information for keeping the heart healthy. Use their website search to locate information about Jump Rope for Heart.

**American School Food Service Association**

[www.asfsa.org](http://www.asfsa.org)

An association interested in seeing that all children have access to healthful school meals and nutrition education. Website includes professional tutorials, kids' site (with jokes and recipes) and announcements of upcoming events.

**American School Health Association** [www.ashaweb.org](http://www.ashaweb.org)

This organization promotes well-being of children and youth by supporting comprehensive school health programs. Offers a range of publications addressing school health instruction.

## Resources

### **Food & Nutrition Information Center**

[www.nal.usda.gov/fnic](http://www.nal.usda.gov/fnic)

Part of the United States Department of Agriculture website. Includes listings from the National Library of Agriculture, which can be accessed by anyone through interlibrary loan procedures. Also has resources for the Healthy School Meals program for food service personnel.

### **National Association for Sport and Physical Education**

**(NASPE)** [www.aahperd.org/naspe](http://www.aahperd.org/naspe)

Website shares research-based and experiential knowledge about physical education. Includes publications addressing guidelines for children's physical activity.

### **National Food Service Management Institute**

[www.nfsmi.org](http://www.nfsmi.org)

Provides information and training to promote the continuous improvement of Child Nutrition Programs. Website includes a resource guide with training materials, videos and other items available for purchase. Emphasis on food service personnel, but also includes material of interest to teachers.

### **National PTA** [www.pta.org](http://www.pta.org)

The PTA has some special programs on school meals and child nutrition. See their website for more information.

### **Society of State Directors of Health, Physical Education and Recreation** [www.thesociety.org](http://www.thesociety.org)

A professional association whose members supervise and coordinate programs in health, physical education and related fields within state departments of education. Informative website.

### **United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)**

[www.fns.usda.gov](http://www.fns.usda.gov)

Their website on Food, Nutrition and Consumer Services provides recommendations and research reports. Also has a

resource list that includes reproducible materials, activity books and posters that can be ordered.

## **Sources for Classroom Activities or Information**

### **Awesome Library** [www.neat-schoolhouse.org](http://www.neat-schoolhouse.org)

Website offers links to reviewed sites of interest to teachers, kids, parents and teens. Click on “Lessons” to see a list of lesson plans.

### **Carol Hurst’s Children’s Literature Site**

[www.carolhurst.com](http://www.carolhurst.com)

Website reviews children’s literature and suggests ways to use books and stories in classroom activities.

### **Children’s Picture Book Database at Miami University**

[www.lib.muohio.edu/pictbks](http://www.lib.muohio.edu/pictbks)

Website has abstracts of over 4000 children’s picture books that can be searched by key words for specific subjects or messages.

### **The Collaborative Lesson Archive**

[faldo.atmos.uiuc.edu/CLA](http://faldo.atmos.uiuc.edu/CLA)

Teachers submit lesson plans to this website. Discussion threads allow other teachers to comment on the ideas or how the lesson works. The ongoing discussions add more depth to the material.

### **Education World** [www.education-world.com](http://www.education-world.com)

Website includes current news relevant to educators, job postings and website reviews. There are an impressive number of teacher-submitted lesson plans on many different topics, including health. Click on “Teacher Lessons” under the site guide.

### **FDA Center for Food Safety & Applied Nutrition**

[www.vm.cfsan.fda.gov/list.html](http://www.vm.cfsan.fda.gov/list.html)

## Resources

Resources on food safety, including kids' quiz and coloring book.

**Health Finder** [www.healthfinder.gov](http://www.healthfinder.gov)

Links to other websites addressing nutrition, physical activity and other health matters.

**Kids Food Cyberclub** [www.kidsfood.org](http://www.kidsfood.org)

Nutrition education materials developed by the Connecticut Association for Human Services, with funding from Kaiser Permanente. Provides lesson plans, in-class activities, kids' games and materials.

**Leafy Greens Council** [www.leafy-greens.org](http://www.leafy-greens.org)

Offers lesson plans, posters and other materials, using a variety of subject areas to encourage kids to eat lots of greens.

**Lessonplan Page** [www.lessonplanspage.com](http://www.lessonplanspage.com)

Includes teacher-contributed lesson plans on many different topics, including physical education.

**Media Awareness Network** [www.media-awareness.ca](http://www.media-awareness.ca)

Provides definitions, explanations, resources for classroom activities, and guidelines for teachers and parents.

**P.E. Central** [pe.central.vt.edu](http://pe.central.vt.edu)

Website includes lesson plans, coaching and assessment ideas, and books of activities that can be ordered directly from the site. Includes materials for adapted P.E. for children with disabilities. Has a philosophical interest in using P.E. activities to promote lifetime physical activity.

**Tufts University Nutrition Navigator** [navigator.tufts.edu](http://navigator.tufts.edu)

Links to websites helpful to educators. Each site is described and given a numerical rating based on quality.

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