
Get Your Kids Moving

When some of us were children, television, DVDs, computers, video games, and social media either had not been invented or didn't rate a mention as long as we could be outside playing.

The situation is much different for today's children. Childhood obesity rates have tripled over the past 25 years. Yet physical activity is just as important now as it ever has been.

Why do children avoid exercise?

- Embarrassment is recognized as one of the main reasons children avoid physical activity. This can stem from a fear of looking silly, which easily turns into a negative attitude toward exercise. Children who question their own skills and abilities may be hesitant to try something new.
- Competition can also be discouraging, because there will always be a loser. That's why I recommend that, prior to the age of ten, children should be encouraged to learn basic skills through small games and group activities without the pressure of winning. An emphasis on enjoyment rather than winning encourages children to participate in a wide variety of sports at school, within the community, and with family and friends.

It's important that young people have a range of options to choose from so they have a better chance of finding something they enjoy. Children who enjoy the rewards of sports participation, such as belonging to a team, achieving goals, and learning new skills, are more likely to continue playing, and in the process, they will develop lifelong habits.

The parent's role

As a parent, your exercise routine and your attitude toward exercise will affect the health of your child. Parents who are active themselves will stimulate their children's interest in physical activity and motivate them to take part. There's not much point in telling your child to go outside and play while you eat chips on the couch.

Your example is especially crucial when your children are young. As they enter to the teen years, their peers will increasingly influence them. But one of the best ways to keep a good relationship with your teen is to find active things you can do together.

Motivating your child to exercise

- To help motivate your children to be active, take every opportunity to give praise and positive feedback for any physical activity. Show enthusiasm and give them support, letting them know you are proud of their efforts.

- Just as physical activity should be encouraged, inactive pastimes should be discouraged. This includes all sedentary activities such as computer games, cruising the Internet, watching DVDs, and constant cellphone texting. These activities lead to motion deprivation, where people spend hours doing little more than sitting. To reverse this trend and burn more calories, it's important to add more movement into your child's lifestyle.
- It's important not to be critical. Praise the positive rather than condemning the negative. It's also important not to use threats or punishment as an incentive to be more active. This can often make activity seem like a punishment in itself.
- Don't rely on your children's schools alone to provide all their physical activity. A supportive family can make all the difference when it comes to exercising more.
- Pray about it! It's amazing how much help God can give you if you seriously ask Him to help you.

A guide for busy parents

If both parents work, it can be difficult to find time for exercise as a family. But there are things you can do.

- On the weekends, focus on outdoor activities like basketball, volleyball, horseback riding or swimming.
- Explore new surroundings at the many parks and hiking trails on and near the Reservation.
- Go on walks, or have an active picnic with a kite or a Frisbee.
- When the weather isn't right for being outdoors, there are even video games such as Wii Fit that can almost "trick" you into being active. These are ideal for busy families, as they can be enjoyed at night in the comfort of the family home.
- Participate in "Just Move It" events at your chapter house.

Many people assume that exercise has to involve sweat, discomfort, and even pain to derive any benefit. The good news is that "no pain, no gain" does not apply when it comes to fat burning and exercise, especially with kids.

However your family chooses to do it, get everyone involved in activities that require you to exercise. This is one of the keys to all of you living long and happy lives.

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