



CHILDREN IN BALANCE

Physicians Make A Difference: Encouraging Healthy Families

As a physician, you are a trusted and respected authority in the community as well as a guiding voice for families. Your opinion matters and can inspire change.

How to be a change agent

- Build relationships with community leaders to reinforce key messages and provide support for lifestyle changes.
- Connect with the school nurse or the school systems' physician. Is there a school health center?
- Look beyond the school day, advocate for healthy snacks and physical activity in the after school environment (i.e. YMCAs, Boys/Girls clubs...)
- Become involved in the school system's wellness policy committee. (Refer to the School Policy & Environment Survey as a checklist for healthy schools)
- Consider becoming a media spokesperson by writing letters to the editor of your local paper, or an editorial about family health.
- Participate or help organize community events about physical activity and nutrition, like family picnics or field days.

Create a Healthy Office Space

- Hang inspirational posters in your office about physical activity and nutrition (refer also to VII Office Systems and Culture).
- Create a healthy waiting room. Think about the magazines displayed: are they focused on image and celebrity or on health?
- Are there vending machines in your office building? If so, what do they sell?
- Remain knowledgeable about current recommendations and research related to physical activity and nutrition (i.e. dietary guidelines, screen time recommendations).

Crossing cultural differences: Focus on the common goal of good health

- Familiarize yourself with eating patterns of ethnic populations in your area.
- Use spokespeople from target populations to bridge messages between the clinic and the community and to help make the connection between eating and physical activity patterns with disease prevention and overall health.
- Be respectful of differences and understand that change may come slowly. Start with small changes that can build over time.

Talking to families

- Acknowledge and discuss that it's difficult to innovate a healthy lifestyle within a hectic family schedule. Offer suggestions, such as spreading physical activity throughout the day if dedicating 1 whole hour is too difficult.
- Focus on family changes, using simple sound bytes like "5-2-1" or "Have family meals at least 3x a week, without TV".
- Choose language relating to health and lifestyle, as opposed to image and pounds.
- Make talking about healthy living a part of every well visit.
- Build from assets. Ask "What do you like to do? What vegetables do you like to eat?" to start a conversation that builds on the family's interests and strengths rather than imposing outside demands.

Created by the Children in Balance initiative at the Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy at Tufts University