

PARENT HEALTH BULLETIN



Pinellas County Health Department

Steps to a HealthierFL—Pinellas County

Motivating Kids to Stay Physically Active

With all the information in the news and on television about the importance of daily physical activity, it is no secret that staying physically active gives us many health benefits. We all know by now that we *should* exercise, but how do we stay motivated to keep it up on a regular basis? And for those of us who are parents, how do we motivate our children to continue and sustain physical activity levels? The important thing to remember is keeping our kids involved with regular physical activity will naturally lead to a healthier life for them.

Perhaps if we understood why kids choose to stay active, we could do a better job of encouraging them in more positive directions. Guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) tell us that social, psychological and emotional factors all play a role in young people's physical activity behavior by contributing to self esteem.

First, studies show that most kids want to develop and display physical ability, such as athletic skills, physical fitness and physical appearance. The feeling of "know how" in a certain area is very important to a child. Using statistics to show improvement levels and rewards such as ribbons and trophies all contribute to a child feeling good about his abilities. By giving feedback to our children about how well they are performing or how much improvement they are showing, we help improve their perception of how skilled they are. This, in turn, improves self esteem.




Second, social acceptance from friends and encouragement from adults who play important roles in our children's lives are essential elements in getting kids to start and continue participating in activities. Many lasting and valuable friendships can be formed in organized team sports and this may be the key for your child to get and stay involved.

Third, just plain fun that results from participating in physical activity can minimize any negative experiences. Having a good time is more than likely to improve the attractiveness of any activity and keep the child coming back. It can also decrease the appeal of other less desirable options such as belonging to gangs or engaging in "at risk" behaviors. Physical fun is a different kind of stimulation. The thrill from rollerblading or water skiing cannot easily be matched by a board game or a computer game. As parents we need to keep this in mind when suggesting options for play.

Research suggests that when physical activity develops self esteem through positive perceptions of ability, social support, and enjoyment, it will result in children continuing and increasing physical activity. That, in turn, will result in a healthier life for your child.

Researched from *The President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports Research Digest*
www.cs.indiana.edu/~jtodhunt/presidentschallenge

There are literally hundreds of ways to enjoy physical activity together as a family.

- Bike to the library together. 
- Walk or bike to your children's sports events to cheer for them.
- Have your children come to your sports events and cheer for you. 
- Celebrate special occasions—birthdays, anniversaries—with some thing active, such as a hike a volleyball game, a Frisbee™ match. 
- Train together for a charity walk or run.



ENERGY TIP

Encourage everyone in the family to take part and keep up the good work by posting a physical activity log on the refrigerator.





Creative Play

One of the most important types of creative activity for children is creative play. Creative play happens when children use materials they have used before in new or different ways, and when children use role playing and imagination. Nothing boosts the creative spirit and feeds a child's soul more than providing time for natural, self-directed play. But many parents don't really understand the value of play in the lives of children, forgetting that play encourages physical, mental, and social development. Play also helps children express and cope with their feelings. Play helps develop each child's

unique perspective and individual style of creative expression. In addition, play provides an excellent opportunity for children to join together, including children with disabilities.

Parents should avoid trying to control play. As long as it is safe, play should be the result of the children's ideas and not directed by an adult. Sometimes it is tough, but try to help your children develop their play based upon their own ideas, not yours. Your goal should be to stimulate and encourage children's satisfaction in playing with each other or by themselves. Pay attention to play, plan for it, and promote it. Learn how to extend children's play through your comments and questions. Try to stimulate creative ideas by encouraging children to come up with new and unusual uses of equipment. Try to remain open to new and original ideas and suggest to your children to come up with more than one solution or answer.

Exercise to Build Healthy Bones

Between the ages of 10 to 18 is when we make the bone that must last a lifetime—this time is known as “peak bone mass.” To reach the best possible peak bone mass means getting enough exercise and calcium. Bones are like a bank account— if we deposit lots of exercise and calcium when we are young, we will have strong bones for later in life.

One important way to help keep our bones healthy for our entire life is through exercise. Exercise is the way we tell our bones that they need to be strong. Just like exercising our muscles can make them grow bigger, exercising our bones makes them work harder, which helps them to build up bone mass. And building bone mass as a child or teenager is especially important because this is when our bones are growing the most.

Weight-bearing exercise is one of the most important things kids can do to build bone mass and reduce the risk for osteoporosis later. Weight-bearing exercises make our bones and muscles work. For exercises, like jogging or jumping rope, our feet and legs are carrying our body weight. Regular weight-bearing exercise can help us to reach the best possible peak bone mass when we are young, and keep that bone strength throughout life.

Weiss's 10 Commandments for Maximizing Motivation

1. *Focus on teaching and practicing skills:* Get the most out of equipment, facilities, instructors; don't introduce competitive play too early; make sure it's fun — provide variety.
2. *Adjust skills & activities:* Change space, equipment, rules; match the activity to the child, not the child to the activity.
3. *Set realistic expectations for each child:* Individual learning rates and goals.
4. *Become an excellent demonstrator:* Lots of “show and tell,” repeated demonstrations; show different ways of doing things.
5. *Catch kids doing things correctly:* Compliment, instruct, and encourage; provide the best possible challenge as a follow-up.
6. *Reduce kids' fears of trying skills:* Provide a hopeful atmosphere mistakes are part of the learning process; reduce fears of getting hurt — show how you've make safety a main concern; show compassion.
7. *KISS:* Keep instructions short & simple; maximize practice & playing time.
8. *Be enthusiastic:* It's contagious! Smile, interact, listen.
9. *Build character:* Be a role model; use teachable moments.
10. *Let the children make some choices:* Involve kids in the decision-making process; ask questions

For more info, go to: www.cs.indiana.edu/~jtodhunt/presidentschallenge Maureen R. Weiss Ph.D.



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For information about Steps to a HealthierFL-Pinellas County visit our website: www.StepsFL.com or call 820-4113.