



Resource 4

Guiding Children and Youth in Making Healthy Choices

Healthy kids make better students.

Better students make healthy communities.

Children and youth who begin each day as healthy individuals can learn more effectively and are more likely to complete their education.

It is important for families to work together with schools and community to model and support children in their growth and development. Our children are faced with many decisions and it is our responsibility to guide them in healthy choices.

Use this as a guide on ways that parents and caregivers can influence children and youth in making healthy choices.

Nutrition and Healthy Food Choices

Healthy foods are the primary building block for a child’s physical growth, brain development and ability to resist disease. Food also affects a child’s emotions, sense of well-being and ability to learn.

Parents and family members can guide children in:

- modeling and making smart choices from every food group;
- finding a balance between food and physical activity; and
- monitoring healthy amounts of good foods.

Physical Education and Activity

Physical education and regular exercise provide the optimal opportunity for all students to learn and develop the skills, knowledge and attitudes necessary to decide to participate in a lifetime of healthful physical activity.

Parents and family members can:

- promote and model a physically active lifestyle;
- provide opportunities for children to participate in school and community activities which allow for movement and exercise such as team and individual sports programs, dance, martial arts and other activities;
- model responsible personal and social behavior in a physical activity setting; and
- provide other opportunities for physical self-expression, challenges, social interaction and enjoyment.

A Healthy and Safe Environment

A healthy and safe environment for children supports a total learning experience that promotes personal growth, healthy interpersonal relationships, wellness and freedom from discrimination and abuse.

Families can maintain a healthy environment by:

- supporting the child's personal safety through a violence/harassment-free environment;
- keeping the child's home environment inviting, clean, safe and in good repair;
- providing an environment where children and all family members feel accepted and valued, and high expectations are set for personal behavior and accomplishments;
- encouraging "global" citizenship through environmental awareness and activities that promote the child to act locally in the community; and
- creating and maintaining a home environment that is free of tobacco, alcohol and other drugs.

Social and Emotional Well Being

Families can support healthy social and emotional well-being in children and youth by encouraging:

- acceptance of self;
- the ability to express thoughts and feelings in a responsible manner;
- understanding and respect for differences in others;
- positive interpersonal relationships;
- the ability to give and receive support;
- balance between meaningful work and play;
- awareness of stressors which interfere with health development; and
- willingness to request assistance when needed.

Health Education and Life Skills

Through modeling, the promotion and support of health education and life skills, families can help with the prevention of the following six risky behaviors:

- use of tobacco, alcohol and other drugs;
- dietary patterns;
- sedentary lifestyles;
- behaviors that result in sexually transmitted diseases and unintended pregnancy;
- behaviors that result in unintentional injuries; and
- violent and other anti-social behaviors.

Contact the New Mexico Public Education Department's School and Family Support Bureau for more information at

www.healthierschools.org