

National PTA's Healthy Lifestyle Month

Did you know the National PTA (Parent Teacher Association) has a network with millions of teachers, administrators, families, and students that strives to help kids become more successful academically in school?

The PTA first began as the National Congress of Mothers. Alice McLellan Birney and Phoebe Apperson Hearst were the co-founding moms who wanted to protect kids from dangerous working and unsanitary living conditions.

The National PTA's "Healthy Lifestyles Month", which focuses on physical health (exercise and diet), was one initiative that sprouted from those early day concerns.

According to the CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) as well as other well documented research, we know that kids who develop and practice healthy eating and exercise habits are more likely to be successful academically in school. Furthermore, we also know through research and studies that poor physical health leads to an increased risk of developing mental health problems.

Often, adults and kids see physical health as something separate from mental health but the two should be thought of as two parts that make a whole. Just as poor physical health can lead to an increased risk of developing mental health problems, poor mental health can have a negative impact on our physical health.

Kids spend so much time in school each day that it's important to make sure we provide them with healthy food choices as well as plenty of opportunities throughout the day for physical activity and exercise. This can be hard to do at times as we all seem to live in a fast-paced world where fast food and/or processed meals are more the norm both inside and outside of school. And those "Once Upon a Time" days, where kids loved being outside playing and exercising before, during and after school seem to occur less and less, as the digital and gaming world seems to fill more and more of a kid's "free time" in and out of school.

The digital world is not going to disappear any time soon so we do need to actively inspire and encourage kids to put down and shut off the digital devices.

With that being said, we need to find activities that encourage and help kids stay physically active. The National PTA's Healthy Lifestyles theme for this year is "Get Off Your Apps."

Parents and schools can encourage and challenge kids to disconnect more from their devices and connect more with family and friends through active play, family time at home and physical education programs and activities at school.

Ideas for Parents:

- Go on a bike ride or hiking. Whether you choose to stroll through your neighborhood or hit some nature or city trails, be sure to connect with your kids by talking with them or by creating an activity. For example, encourage your kids to name the types of trees or birds along the trail. Kids want to interact and learn.
- Have kids help with chores that require them to move, such as mowing the lawn or raking up leaves. Reward them with a more relaxed family time, such as a family movie night in or out of the house.
- Go a step further and invite families in the neighborhood to participate by having a neighborhood fun night where kids and adults play games together, such as volleyball or a game of basketball (“Horse,” etc.) either family vs. family or kids vs. parents. Include a healthy meal, snacks and drinks.
- Have a Neighborhood Scavenger Hunt where motorized vehicles are not allowed to be used to go from place to place to find items or clues.

Ideas for Schools:

- Hold a steps program where kids can track the number of steps they take throughout the day. Working with teacher and administration guidance, allow kids to set up a rewards system.
- Organize teachers vs. students activities such as games (basketball, volleyball etc.) or less formal activities like walking/steps, jump roping etc.
- Have a scavenger hunt inside and outside (on school property) that incorporates classroom skills as well as physical activity.

Just remember, whatever you do, keep it age appropriate, fun and healthy!

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