

PARENTS CAN PLAY VITAL ROLE IN ENCOURAGING CHILDREN'S ACTIVE, HEALTHY LIFESTYLES

Campaign to Educate Parents and Guardians about Supporting Positive Activity for Children

Today's children may fantasize about growing up to be svelte celebrities, athletes or models. The irony, however, is that children are, in large measure, inactive, unfit and increasingly overstressed.

In recognizing that physical inactivity has contributed to an unprecedented epidemic of overweight children, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reminds parents that they can play a major role in encouraging their children to become more active.

The CDC developed a national, multimedia, multicultural campaign called **VERB.™ It's what you do.** to encourage children to increase their physical activity to improve their health and displace unhealthy, risky behaviors. A major part of the five-year campaign is informing parents, teachers, and athletic directors about the importance of supporting physical activity.

"Children are more likely to continue physical activity if they enjoy it," says Dr. Jim Marks, M.D., M.P.H., director of the National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion at CDC. "Encouraging a positive activity that fits your child's personality is important in order to sustain the VERB movement."

Encouraging a physically active lifestyle for children may be easier than parents think. Parents can start by suggesting several options that are available through local park districts, schools, and community programs. But VERB is also about much more than athletics.

VERB. It's what you do.

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“Children not only need to burn energy for healthy development, but also need to interact with peers, parents, and other role models in a safe, supportive environment to learn life skills, such as setting and achieving goals, competing fairly and resolving disputes peaceably,” says Dr. Marks.

Assessing Youths' Needs

“VERB encourages parents to assess the physical activity patterns of their children to help refer them to the appropriate physical activity programs,” says Mike Greenwell, director of communications for CDC's chronic disease center. “For example, if a child prefers fast paced games, parents can suggest running, aerobics or basketball. By contrast, children who prefer leisurely activities may enjoy walking, yoga or badminton.”

Experts recommend that children participate in at least 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity each day, such as walking or playing hopscotch. Other ways to be active include swimming, inline skating, Double Dutch jump roping, and dancing.

Parents also can support their children's participation in physical activity by being physically active role models, Greenwell says. Family events and vacations can involve physical activities such as roller skating parties and swimming trips. For children who love to explore and search in new territories, hiking and biking are perfect ways to incorporate physical activity.

“Parents who encourage and endorse physical activities in their own lives are more likely to pass on these good habits to their children,” says Dr. Marks. “By contrast, parents with little physical involvement typically have less active children.”

More good news is that children who lead active lifestyles are likely to remain active as adults and pass on their healthy lifestyle habits to their own children. Consider the following benefits of regular physical activity for growing children:

- Helps build and maintain healthy bones and muscles.
- Helps control weight, build lean muscle and reduce fat.
- Reduces feelings of depression, stress, and anxiety.
- Promotes psychological well-being, including higher levels of self-esteem and self-concept.
- Increases flexibility and aerobic endurance.¹

Combat Inactivity — The Number One Problem

Youth inactivity has increased continually in recent years. About 14 percent of young people report no recent physical activity. Inactivity is more common among females (14%) than males (7%) and among black females (21%) than white females (12%). Furthermore, studies have proven that as children get older, participation in all types of physical activity declines strikingly as age or grade in school increases.²

Physical inactivity among today's youth can be traced to several factors. Demographics and individual factors, such as confidence and lack of time, influence the level of physical activity. Family and peer support, or the lack thereof, affect children's willingness and likelihood to participate in physical activity. Parental support for physical activity is correlated with active lifestyles among children. Adequate play spaces, equipment, and transportation all affect the activity levels as well.

How to Learn More

The integrated VERB.™ It's what you do. campaign uses advertising, marketing, events and partnership activities to ensure that campaign messages reach children whenever they are looking for something positive to do. Through multicultural media partnerships, the campaign is designed to reach children in all socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds — including specific outreach for African Americans, Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders, Native Americans, and Hispanic/Latinos. The VERB Web site, www.VERBparents.com, is a resource parents looking for ways to encourage positive physical activities among tweens. For more information about the campaign see www.cdc.gov/youthcampaign or visit the tween Web site at www.VERBnow.com.

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¹ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Physical Activity and Health: A Report of the Surgeon General.

² U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Centers for Disease Control and Prevention National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. The President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports.

Sidebar:

WHAT CAN PARENTS OR GUARDIANS DO TO PROMOTE CHILDRENS' PHYSICAL ACTIVITY?

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) stresses the importance of parents' role in encouraging healthy lifestyles and displacing risky behaviors. Following are a few suggestions to help parents promote physical activity.

- Set a good example by being physically active.
- Encourage children to be physically active.
- Play and be physically active with children.
- Inform children about sports and recreation programs in their community.
- Teach children safety rules and make sure they have the clothing and equipment needed to participate safely in physical activities.
- Be an advocate for convenient, safe, and adequate places for children to play and take part in physical activity programs.
- Encourage school administrators and community leaders to support daily physical education and other programs that promote lifelong physical activity, not just competitive sports.
- Ensure children are engaged in school and community organizations.
- Encourage children to volunteer in the community.

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Source: <http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dash/physcat.htm>