

Parents Can Lead the Way to More Active Families

CDC's VERB Campaign Offers Parents Inspiration and Ideas to Get Children Moving

Time and again, parents are encouraged to “lead by example.” But what happens when parents need some examples themselves? A recent survey by the National Association for Sport & Physical Education (NASPE) revealed that 80 percent of parents of 6-11-year-olds feel they are responsible for their child’s weight and physical fitness. At the same time, children’s activity levels have dropped and the number of overweight children has doubled in the past 20 years.¹ The end result: many parents feel guilty for children’s low activity levels, but they’re exposed to fewer examples of ways to raise active families.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has developed a national, multicultural campaign called **VERB™** to encourage children to increase their physical activity to improve their health and displace unhealthy, risky behaviors. A major part of the 5-year campaign is informing parents about the importance of supporting physical activity and providing them with inspiration and ideas to create active families.

Take the Lead – Then Work Together

The first step for many parents in leading their children toward a more active lifestyle is determining the family’s current activity level. In today’s hectic world, it’s often assumed that a busy lifestyle is an active lifestyle, but that isn’t necessarily true. Experts recommend that children participate in at least 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity each day. To lead by example, parents need to take a fresh look at the family’s activity level and address any shortcomings.

Parents Lead the Way/2

Parents can start by contacting their child's school to learn more about how active their children are during the day. The next step for parents is evaluating how active children are once they're home, keeping in mind that physical activity is not just about sports but can include helping out in the garden or dancing to the radio. Parents should also consider how frequently the family participates in physical activities together – do they drive when it's possible to walk or have family vacations that include physical elements like hiking or swimming?

For the Horadam family of Houston, Texas, evaluating family activity led to focusing in on 12-year-old Matt. Since the age of 9, Matt's allergy and asthma medications increased his craving for sweets. Coupled with inactivity, Matt's weight started to climb. His mom, Pattie, says, "I felt sorry for him because he was sick, so I didn't push him to exercise." But when Pattie and her husband Bill took stock of the family's health, they realized that raising activity levels was an important way to help them all, especially Matt.

Changes for Matt translated into changes for the Horadam family. The family started taking walks together in the evening and tracking their steps with pedometers. Pattie says, "There's rarely a day that Matt doesn't do something active." And with his increased activity has come increased confidence. "Everything feels better," Matt says. "Even my friends have noticed a difference."

Communication and Creativity

VERB can help parents communicate with their children about physical activity in a positive and supportive way. The campaign encourages children to discover their VERB – a physical activity they really enjoy – and go and try it. VERB encourages parents to listen to their children, which opens the door of communication for a positive exchange of ideas. Parents can

Parents Lead the Way/3

create an active family through positive, shared experience. These creative tips can help parents lead the way:

- Give each family member the opportunity to choose family activities.
- Write ideas on the family message board and vote or drop suggestions into a baseball cap and pick one at random.
- Incorporate physical activity into everyday life – park at the back of the lot and take some extra steps or walk all the way around the mall before you begin shopping.
- Ask your children to teach you their favorite backyard game, such as Capture the Flag or kickball. Whether it’s a game you’ve played before or something new, learning it from your child helps you discover and excites them about play.
- Introduce your children to activities you enjoyed at their age – show off your 4 Square skills and challenge each other to invent new moves.
- Encourage activities with other families in your neighborhood – hold a kickball tournament in the park or set up a badminton net in the yard between houses.
- Take a family field trip to your local community center. Pick up the class schedule and look through it together, talking about activities that interest you.
- Schedule a family night at your local community center. Everyone can attend a class that interests them, and going together cuts down on carpool time and still allows everyone to try something on their own.

Community Organizations are Key - Connect through VERBparents.com

Parents can support children’s interests by contacting community-based organizations. Many YMCAs have family nights for families to get active together. Local parks and recreation departments have “open gym” time when children can shoot hoops, run on the track, or try new games. Busy parents can use “VERB Activity Finder” at VERBparents.com to locate fun family activities in their community.

About the VERB Campaign

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 physical to do. Through multicultural media partnerships, the campaign is designed to reach children from all socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds – including specific outreach for African Americans, Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders, Native Americans and Hispanic/Latinos. For more information about the campaign, see www.cdc.gov/youthcampaign or visit the tween Web site at www.VERBnow.com or the parents' Web site at www.VERBparents.com.

###

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Physical Activity and Health: A Report of the Surgeon General. Atlanta, GA: U. S. Department of Health and Human Services; 1996.