

Nutrition and Physical Activity: Educational Opportunities for Families

Tip Sheet

Nutrition and Physical Activity Self-Assessment Child Care (NAP SACC)

Healthy Child Care Project

FORWARD DuPage

www.forwarddupage.org

Best Practice: Offer nutrition and physical activity education opportunities to parents at least two times a year.

Rationale: The more parents are kept informed about what their children are learning about and doing in the child care facility, the more they are able to participate in facility activities as well as reinforce those lessons in the home. Regular information to parents about nutrition and physical activity will make them more knowledgeable and better able to support the facility's efforts to get their children active and eating healthy.ⁱ

Too often when we think "parent education" we think we need to host a workshop or present families with handouts and resources. In planning for the event or copying the resource, we acknowledge that parents are often too busy to come out for a workshop and they do not always read the information sent home. With these barriers in mind, included here is a list of twelve ways to communicate with, educate or share information with families. If you employ several of these practices, you will find it quite easy to meet your goal of educating parents at least twice a year (but realistically, more like once or twice a month). You will provide a steady and consistent flow of information for parents to absorb or file away for another time. You are also more likely to present information in a way that matches a variety of learning styles.

Tips and Strategies: Systems and Methods for Communicating with Families

1. **Articles or links to articles in the Parent Handbook** - When you feel an article or resource is consistent with your philosophy and will help families better understand or easily settle into your center/program, include articles/links in your parent handbook (e.g., The Benefits of Family-Style Dining; The Importance of Getting Children Outdoors, Even in Cold Weather, etc.)
2. **Tips, articles, or links in your monthly newsletter** - Many programs distribute a family newsletter with classroom activities, program/center updates and current/relevant tips and information that might be useful to families. Newsletters are sent home in cubbies, posted on bulletin boards or are posted on the program's website. There are a number of on-line resources for use in your monthly newsletter, including the FORWARD Corner which is published monthly and included in the YWCA newsletter to providers and on the FORWARD website www.forwarddupage.org (under archives).
3. **Tips, articles, or links on your program website** - Multisite programs often do this to build their credibility and establish their expertise in certain areas. They are also a great resource for families and help to reinforce the program's unique philosophy. If you want your program to be known for its commitment to children's health and well-being, include articles, links or information on your website.

4. **On-site bulletin boards** - Most programs post current and relevant information on their program's bulletin board. 5.4.3.2.1 Go!® Posters, My Plate flyers, USDA Child Care Food Program information, Upcoming Community Event flyers and other resources are great reminders to your parents to stay focused on healthy living.

5. **Classroom bulletin boards or "Look What We Did Today" notices** - Encourage your families to engage children in a discussion about their day or what they are learning. Postings on your bulletin board, or a quick end of day message to families, gives parents the tools to get these conversations started and it extends the learning opportunity into the home to increase the likelihood that children will remember and act on what they learn in the school day. Photo displays (children being active, children dancing, children on the playground, children mastering a gross motor skill, children serving themselves at a meal, children completing an art, science or cooking project, etc.) reinforce healthy habits, best practices and provide a visual as parents engage their children in conversation.

6. **Contests and Engagement Activities** - Invite your parents to get involved by offering contests with prizes (a 5.4.3.2.1.Go!® magnet) raffle prizes (5% off a week's tuition, free activity/nutrition resources). One program we worked with asked parents to take a photo of their family being active during the winter (outdoors, around water/ice, inside their home, during a dance marathon and so on). Everyone who participated had their photo posted on the bulletin board (a bit of peer pressure here) and had their name entered into a contest to win a prize. Challenge families to a "monthly action step" and ask them to record their experience on an index card (post) or check off their name on a posted list when they complete the step. The FORWARD Corner (published in the YWCA newsletter and in the FORWARD DuPage archives @ www.forwarddupage.org) gives suggestions for monthly action steps: For example, October is *Farm to Table* month. The action item was: Pick apples and make applesauce, May, which is *Turn off the TV Week*, asked families to select one day a week to be TV free and in December, families were encouraged to *Celebrate Healthy* by reworking one holiday recipe to make it a bit healthier.

7. **End-of-Day Displays or Presentations** - Once or twice a year, set up an educational display for families to view during pick up times. Pick topics with a lot of available resources like: Rethink Your Drink, Reading Nutrition Labels, Go, Slow, Whoa Foods, My Plate, Yoga cards and posters, Relieving Stress, and so on. Set up activities that parents and children can do together.

8. **End-of-Day Coaching** - Be sure to take credit for all of the informal education you do with families via end-of-day coaching sessions. Be a resource to families when they are struggling at home with healthy habits or when their children are struggling within your program. Given the number of hours of training you've sat in on and the number of children and families you've worked with through the years, you are the expert and certainly have a lot of solid tips and information to share. A listening ear, a problem-solving partner, a handout or flyer and a link to resources is often appreciated.

9. **Workshop and Seminars** - Invite the experts in to facilitate a parent meeting, workshop, or seminar around a specific topic such as: Limiting Screen Time, Getting Active as a Family, Transitioning to a Healthier Diet, Cooking with Children, etc. Pull from the expertise of current or past families (nutritionists, doctors, P.E. teachers, wellness center directors, etc.) or look to FORWARD, local Non-Profits, Illinois Extension, DECC members (DuPage Early

Child Collaborative), the Community Education staff of the local health department, local hospitals, the YMCA and so on.

10. **Family Nights and Family Seasonal Special Events** - Set up a family night that is a combination of educational and play activities for families to participate in together. Set up a showcase of the physical activities that children participate in during the day. Select activities that promote specific skill-building for children to show their parents what they have learned. Set up a learning center to prepare a healthy snack (Pinterest is full of creative snack ideas for children). Do a bit of research or engage the experts in your community. If your program offers seasonal or holiday special events, take a few minutes to weave in some educational topics or tips.

11. **Parent-teacher conferences** - Many programs offer parent-teacher conferences. As you share a child's developmental milestones or challenges, be sure to share children's self-help skills at the lunch/snack table, eating habits, the physical skills the child has mastered, tips for families to reinforce the same messages at home and so on. Leave parents with a handout or flyer that reinforces your messages or helps in problem-solving any of your/their concerns.

12. **Parent Advisory Committee** - Create a Parent Advisory Committee and promote peer to peer leadership, sharing and learning. When you use your PAT as a resource, they can help you assess what methods will be most effective; what topics are most relevant and what community resources may be at your fingertips.

Tips and Strategies: Links to some of our favorite Healthy Habits Resources for Families

1. FORWARD Corner: <http://www.forwarddupage.org/news---events.html>
2. FORWARD DUPAGE: Early Childhood Resources: <http://www.forwarddupage.org/early-childhood-resources.html>
3. Color Me Healthy Family Newsletters: <http://www.colormehealthy.com/>
4. We Can! <https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/educational/wecan/tools-resources/parent-tip-sheets.htm>
5. YMCA of the USA, Health Family Home: <https://www.ymca.net/healthy-family-home>
6. My Plate: <https://www.choosemyplate.gov/browse-by-audience/view-all-audiences/families>
7. 5.4.3.2.1. Go! ® <https://www.dupagehealth.org/DocumentCenter/View/1137/54321-Flyer-PDF?bidId>
8. Five SMART: <http://www.clocc.net/our-focus-areas/health-promotion-and-public-education/fivesmart/fivesmart-materials/>
9. Go Slow Whoa Foods: <https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/educational/wecan/eat-right/choosing-foods.htm>
10. Action for Healthy kids - Parents for Healthy Kids: <https://www.actionforhealthykids.org/parents-for-healthy-kids/>
11. American Heart Association:

Try these links:

- [Get Smart in the Kitchen](#)
 - [Snack and Sip Smarter](#)
 - [Fruits and Veggies Toolkit for Kids](#)
 - [Toolkit de Frutas y Verduras para Niños](#)
12. Chop Chop: <https://www.chopchopfamily.org/recipes/>
 13. Nibbles for Health: USDA Food and Nutrition Service:
<https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/nibbles>
 14. WIC Resources for Families: [https://wicworks.fns.usda.gov/explore-resources?f\[0\]=topic:40](https://wicworks.fns.usda.gov/explore-resources?f[0]=topic:40)
 15. Rethink Your Drink <https://www.actionforhealthykids.org/activity/rethink-your-drink/>
https://www.cdc.gov/healthyweight/healthy_eating/drinks.html

^{i i} NAP SACC Consultant Technical Assistance Manual, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

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