Promote Active Play Through Written Policies and Practices

Nutrition and Wellness Tips for Young Children:
Provider Handbook for the Child and Adult Care Food Program

A written policy is a statement you write about the importance you give to something in your child care program. You can use such a statement in your program handbook, descriptions, or advertisements, and in the materials you give to parents to tell how important active play (physical activity) and movement are, and how these will be a big part of the day the children spend with you.

Why are written policies that promote physical activity important?

- **Policy statements can help child care providers and families** understand why daily physical activity is so important for children's health, development, and weight.
- **Policies describing outdoor physical activity can encourage outdoor play** in most weather conditions. This can help families understand the need to make sure their children are dressed appropriately for the weather each day.
- **When new staff start working at the child care program,** written policies will help them learn about responsibilities and expectations at the program.

What types of physical activity policies and practices should I have?

The best child care programs have written policies that include the benefits of physical activity and ways for children to participate in fun active play. When writing or revising policies, include the:

- **Benefits:** The benefits of physical activity and outdoor play should be listed. (See the *Let's Move! Child Care* Web site for more information *http://healthykidshealthyfuture.org/content/hkhf/home/activities.html*.)
- **Duration:** Children should spend 60 to 120 minutes each day outdoors depending on their age and weather conditions. Policies should promote movement over the course of the day through two or more structured activities or games that are led by a caregiver. Policies should also describe what will be done to ensure active play on days with more extreme weather (examples: very hot, very cold, or thunderstorms).
- **Water availability:** Make sure drinking water is freely available, both indoors and outdoors, throughout the day. (See the *Make Water Available* tip sheet on page 51 for more information.)
- **Setting:** Covered areas for shade and shelter should be available outdoors.
- **Clothing and Footwear:** Clothing should permit easy movement that enables children to participate fully in active play. Footwear should provide support for running and climbing.

more 'policies' tips on next page ...

... more 'policies' tips

- **Sunscreen:** Children should be protected from the sun by using shade, sun-protective clothing, and "broad-spectrum" sunscreen with UVB-ray and UVA-ray protection of SPF 15 or higher, with permission from parents or guardians.

- **Safety procedures:** Activity areas should be clear of sharp objects, trash, or other objects that could cause injury. Proper safety equipment should be used for the age of the children, for example, soft balls and bats should be used instead of hard balls and bats with younger children.

What is an example of a written policy on physical activity?

There are many tools to help you write a physical activity policy for your child care program and communicate its importance to staff and families. One way to begin is with an assessment of the child care center or home. See "Additional Resources" on page 97, or visit the *Let's Move Child Care* Web site, *http://healthykidshealthyfuture.org/welcome.html*. Here is an example of a policy for outdoor play and appropriate clothing and footwear for active play:

Children attending ABC Child Care shall play outdoors daily when weather and air quality conditions do not pose a significant health risk. Time planned for outdoor play and physical activity depends on the age group and weather conditions. Activities shall include structured play (led by the adult caregiver) and free play (not led by an adult).

- **Toddlers (12 months to 3 years old)** shall participate in 60 to 90 minutes per day of moderate to vigorous physical activity. **Preschoolers (3 to 6 years old)** shall participate in 90 to 120 minutes per day of moderate to vigorous physical activity.

- **Children shall be dressed appropriately for the weather,** including wearing appropriate seasonal clothing and footwear, so they can participate fully, move freely, and play safely.

- **Child care providers will inform parents, caregivers, and families** that children need to be dressed appropriately for the current weather conditions to play outdoors.

  Children should wear clothing appropriate for the current weather:
  - **Snow:** heavy coat, waterproof boots, hat, and mittens.
  - **Rain:** raincoat and waterproof boots.
  - **Different temperatures during the day:** layers of clothing.

  Footwear should provide support for running and climbing. Examples of **appropriate** footwear include sneakers, gym shoes, and other shoes with rubber soles that enclose the feet and will not come off easily. **Examples of inappropriate clothing and footwear include:**

  - **Footwear that can come off while running**, or that does not provide support for climbing (examples: flip-flops, beach sandals, and clogs).
  - **Clothing that can catch on playground equipment** (examples: clothes with drawstrings or loops).
  - **Clothing that does not protect children** from the current weather conditions.

SAMPLE

Activities

How can I implement policies and practices that promote physical activity?

Think about how you communicate with staff and families to make sure everyone understands and implements the policies and expectations. If possible, include written policy statements on physical activity in child care program or staff policy handbooks. Share these policies with families through a newsletter or take-home flyer. Here are some these ideas to ensure that these policies are understood and implemented.

How can you make everyone aware of the policies? Mark your choices.

- ☐ **Post the written policies** in a location where everyone can read and be aware of them.
- ☐ **When new families are registering their children in your child care program,** talk about the existing physical activity policies so they know what to expect. Encourage families to support active play at home.
- ☐ **Other ideas:** _____

How can you encourage participation in training or education sessions? Mark your choices.

- ☐ **Provide mini-education programs to parents** so they understand the reasons for the policies for physical activity and outdoor play. Use examples of existing physical activity best practices, such as those items listed in the 'Healthy Checklist' on the *Let's Move! Child Care* Web site. *http://healthykidshealthyfuture.org/welcome.html*
- ☐ **Have staff participate in training sessions on physical activity at least twice a year.** Staff training should be provided by a qualified child care trainer with expertise in physical activity for young children.
- ☐ **Other ideas:** _____

How can you implement these policies every day? Mark your choices.

- ☐ **Encourage all children to try new activities and celebrate with children when they participate at any skill level.** Focus on self-challenge, and find a new goal for each child according to his or her skill level. For example, say, "You did three hops on one foot. Now can you do four?"
- ☐ **Schedule active play before mealtimes.** This way, kids will feel hungry for their meal and will behave better, making for a more pleasant mealtime experience for everyone.
- ☐ **Other ideas:** _____

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My Notes: