



Guidelines for a Healthy Lifestyle

These are a set of common-sense ideas that are truly helpful to children with attentional, learning and behavioral/emotional difficulties. They are part of a lifelong set of habits that help to manage stress, sustain energy for attention and effort to non-preferred tasks, enhance learning, reduce frustration, and improve self esteem.

The key to these simple ideas is to "practice" them regularly. They may be helpful when "used" situationally in response to stress or difficulties. However regular "practice" serves to eliminate and reduce many of the ups and downs that befuddle children with attention, learning and social/emotional difficulties.

We encourage parents to consider how to make some of these activities into family habits. Make them a routine that describes something about your family. Just as some families are "soccer," "theater," "skiing," "boating," "church," or "camping" families, where they share a common activity and do it (practice it) on a regular basis, you can incorporate these activities into a regular habit for all family members.

Do not just "practice" these activities for your kids! Do them for yourself. They will help you to manage stress, focus and be happier. In addition, your children are more likely to make them a part of their own lifestyle if they see you "doing" rather than "saying." If they see that exercise is as regular as brushing your teeth (we're assuming you do that at least daily) in your home, they will easily pick up on incorporating exercise into their daily routine.

Exercise

Do something most days. Routines like going for a morning or evening walk are easy and can be done daily. Swimming, biking, running, or playing a sport are great, but often are dependent on weather, availability of equipment or other people. Indoor activities such as yoga, weight lifting, calisthenics, martial arts, stretching, riding an exercise bike, or running on a treadmill are easy to do at home and on a daily basis. Joining a gym and having regular times to go, like after school can be great (kids often do their homework more efficiently after exercise). Broaden the concept of exercise so it includes dance lessons, working in the garden, or a vigorous game on the Nintendo Wii to help make it more regular. The key: make it part of virtually every day!

Children can also benefit from exercise and play at other times of the day. Enrolling your child in organized sports and other physical activities gives them healthy outlets for their pent up energy. Choose a sport that your child will enjoy and that suits their strengths. Sports such as baseball or football that involve a lot of "down time" are not the best fit for children with attention problems. Instead choose individual or team sports like basketball, hockey, or swimming, that require constant motion so your child will not lose focus during gameplay. Children who are easily frustrated by competition may benefit from martial arts or yoga, which offer structure and some social interaction without the stigma of winners and losers.

Books

Ratey, John J., M.D. with Eric Hagerman. (2008). Spark: The Revolutionary New Science of Exercise and the Brain. New York, NY: Little, Brown and Company.

Websites

<http://www.additudemag.com/adhd/article/3142.html> (Describes the benefits of exercise for ADHD kids)

<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/exercise-and-stress/SR00036> (Describes how and why exercise reduces stress)