



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. These are behaviors, choices and commitments that have a real benefit when they are a part of a person's daily routine. 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. Do not just "practice" these activities for your kids! Do them for yourself. In addition, your children are more likely to make them a part of their own lifestyle if they see you "doing" rather than "saying."

Positive Thinking

Optimism isn't just the difference between a glass half full and a glass half empty. It's the difference between stress and stress reduction, and even between the sniffles and a resistance to the common cold. Drastic changes are not necessary for these benefits; working on small aspects will be easier to tackle and improvement will be seen more quickly. Try helping your child practice some of these:

- Take some time during the day to consider your thoughts, and if you find they are mostly negative, put a quick, positive spin on them. If your child is negative about not completing some tasks that day, spin it around and encourage them to think about the tasks they have accomplished and their success in those areas.
- Laughing. It doesn't sound like a lot, but laughing and smiling during the day can help reduce stress and help maintain a positive outlook.
- Exercising and a healthy diet can reduce stress and seeing a positive change in physical health will help keep you optimistic. Laughing and playing is important for children.
- One negative person can bring a whole crowd down, so focus on spending time with people who are positive and supportive. People who are cynical and think negatively can increase your stress level and influence your own thinking as well.
- Encourage your child to practice positive self-talk by not saying anything to themselves that they wouldn't say to someone else. Teach this when you help them learn social etiquette skills.

Books

Huebner, Dawn. (2006). *What to Do When You Grumble Too Much: A Kid's Guide to Overcoming Negativity*. Washington, DC: Magination Press. (Helps children and parents develop behavioral and cognitive techniques to treat negative thinking. Recommended for children ages 9-12.)

Websites

<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/positive-thinking/SR00009> (Tips for stress reduction and how to think positive.)