Increase Physical Activity

Overweight and lack of fitness plagues children who are less active. They spend too little time in activities that require using large muscles. Riding around in vehicles, watching TV, and playing video games do not keep children fit and healthy.

Bobbi Rose is a child care health professional with some practical suggestions for teachers and caregivers. Nurse Rose says that child care facilities should have large areas indoors and outdoors for physical activity and toys that encourage large muscle play in any weather. In the September/October 2006 issue of the California ChildCare Health Program newsletter, Child Care Health Connections, she suggests streamers, balls, tricycles, and climbing structures. Here are some more of her easy-to-use ideas: For transitions, line up by hopping or skipping. At circle time, teach dance steps and play large muscle movement games. Walk for field trips. Be a role model by getting involved in active play. Bring in photos that show you are enjoying a physical activity such as playing a sport, hiking or dancing. Walk instead of drive. Take the stairs whenever you can. Publicly admire parents who exercise with their children.

For this excellent California newsletter and many other great handouts, tools and bi-lingual materials, view http://ucsfchildcarehealth.org.

Communicating with Pediatricians About Children with Special Needs

Educators, health professionals and families care about the well-being of children. Too often, each misses opportunities to collaborate with others for better support of families and children.

Educators need information from health professionals about how to keep children safe and healthy. Health professionals benefit from learning from educators about their observations of children and by being informed by educators about the environment where children’s needs must be met. Everyone is frustrated by the barriers that make collaborative planning difficult. Communicating effectively is the key.

Sometimes, a particular health professional practice cares for more than one family in the child care facility. As time permits, consider setting up a face-to-face meeting with someone in authority in the practice to talk about how you and the staff of the practice can help each other.

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The appointment might be with the practice’s office manager, or with the lead nurse or doctor. Start the conversation by identifying the children in your facility who receive care from the health professional’s practice. Explain your desire to work with the health professional for the benefit of the children. Suggest the staff of your facility and of the practice have a mutual need for the least burdensome approach.

Because of confidentiality constraints, all requests for information about individual children require legal consent from parents. Be sure that any forms you want completed by a health professional include when and how it is best to contact you, why you need to know about the child, and how you will use the information. If forms and phone calls aren’t working, consider asking the parent arrange for an appointment for a face-to-face meeting when you can be present. Be clear about how much time you’d like to have booked on the health professional’s schedule. With the parent and health professional present, an educator has a good opportunity to foster three-way communication and collaborative planning for the child.

The educator might say: “I am here to learn how we can work together to do a better job of caring for (child’s name).” Be prepared with a written list of your observations, a list of concerns and requests for information that you have shared with the child’s parents in advance. Give these written lists to the health professional at the outset so the time allocated for the appointment can be used well.

For more discussion about Linking Health Care with Child Care, see page 5 and 6 in the Spring 1999 issue of Health Link on the ECELS website, www.ecels-healthychildcarepa.org. All the back issues of Health Link and Health Link Online are listed chronologically in the Section “Publications and Media.”

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**Sexual Abuse**

One in 4 girls and one in 6 boys are sexually abused by 18 years of age. Currently, child protective and criminal justice systems address child sexual abuse after it happens. To prevent abuse, teachers and parents should talk to children about keeping themselves safe and to tell someone if they think they might be abused. However, adults, not children, must be responsible for preventing abuse by making it hard for abuse to happen. Try to arrange care so that caregivers are observed easily and often. Denying privacy is a strong deterrent to abuse.

Adults who care for children have many hours to observe them. Whenever they suspect that something is not right, they should record and report their observations to a child abuse hotline. Early education and child care practitioners are mandated reporters of suspected child abuse. Their identity and liability for making the report is protected by law.

No specific signs reveal sexual abuse. Physical and behavioral signs may include discomfort walking or sitting, frequent urinary tract infections, being diagnosed with a sexually transmitted disease, masturbating frequently, being depressed, having sexual knowledge beyond age expectations, acting out sexually on others, and being preoccupied with sex or self-injurious behaviors.

In Pennsylvania, you can report suspected abuse to ChildLine 1-800-932-0313, to the National Child Abuse Hotline 800-422-4453, or to the National Center for Missing Children 800-843-5678.

Professional Development opportunities on this topic are available throughout the state. See the ECELS self-learning module, SLM-Child Abuse and Neglect on the ECELS website. For workshops in Allegheny County, contact Julie Evans, MSW, at Pittsburgh Action Against Rape (PAAR), juliee@paar.net and visit www.paar.net.

Angela Fogle is the Executive Director of the statewide child abuse prevention education and service organization, Pennsylvania Family Support Alliance (PFSA). She notes that community involvement is essential to protect children from abuse. Those who come into contact with children in their jobs are vital links to prevent and stop all types of child abuse. Statewide, PFSA affiliates provide on-site professional development for staff that teaches the physical and behavioral indications of abuse, proper procedures for reporting, and guidelines for working more effectively with local agencies for children and youth services. For workshops and more information, phone PFSA at 800-448-4906 and view www.pennsylvaniafamilysupportalliance.org.

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Editor: Susan S. Aronson, MD, FAAP. Contact ECELS at: 484-446-3003 or 800-24-ECELS; ecels@paaap.org; PA AAP, Rose Tree Corporate Center, Bldg II, Suite 3007, 1400 N. Providence Road, Media, PA 19063.