Healthy Habits

Healthy children eat well, move around a lot, and feel good about themselves and about other people. As a parent, there are simple ways you can encourage your child to develop healthy habits and feelings that will help him or her learn better in school and get along with others. Here are some everyday things you can do:

GIVE YOUR CHILD TIME AND ATTENTION

- Spend time with your child. Respond to his needs. This will help him feel good about himself.
- Show love and caring for your child and other family members. This will help your child learn how to relate to other people.

BE HEALTHY

- Be a positive role model. If you practice healthy habits, it will be easier to teach your child to do the same.
- Teach your child how to brush his teeth, wash his hands and use tissues.
- Be sure that your baby is well-rested. Be sure your child gets 10-12 hours of sleep each night.
- Keep all well visits with the doctor and make sure his immunizations (shots) are up to date.

EAT HEALTHY

- Make feeding times enjoyable for you and your baby. Don't worry if things get messy as you introduce new foods.
- Introduce healthy snacks, such as cut-up fruits and vegetables. Avoid salty, greasy snacks.
- Make a game out of reading food labels and learning which foods are healthy.

HELP YOUR CHILD TO BE ACTIVE

- See that your baby has plenty of active playtime when he can kick, reach for things and push himself up. Support him as he learns to sit up, crawl and pull up to stand. Help him play with rattles, busy gyms, blocks and other infant toys he can grasp, bang and shake.
- Roll, throw and kick a ball with your child. Play hide-and-seek, tag or jump rope with your child, which will help your child develop large muscle coordination.
- Get moving together as a family: Go for a walk or bike ride after dinner instead of watching TV. Practice galloping, hopping and jumping together outside, show that being active is fun.
- Help your child develop his small muscles by scribbling with crayons or playing with Play-Doh.

FOCUS ON THE POSITIVE

- Celebrate successes with praise, not with food, candy or sweets.
- Focus on positive behaviors, not the negative ones, so that your child feels secure and loved.
- Discourage temper tantrums by talking with and listening to your child after an outburst instead of getting angry or punishing.
- Allow your child to be angry and then talk about it. Avoid spanking or yelling, which teaches your child that these behaviors are okay. Remember that discipline is not a punishment, but a way of teaching and nurturing your child to do things well, to learn self-control, and to care about people.

SET LIMITS

- Limit TV viewing; instead read books together and make up stories.
- Set specific goals and limits, such as an hour of physical activity a day or two desserts a week.