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Elise Cabrera

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Promoting Healthy Living Among Families

Elise Cabrera

A Capstone Project for the Bachelor of Science in Human Development and Family Science

Promoting Healthy Living Among Families

Introduction

Parents play an active role in their children's well-being by making the majority of decisions towards their health. For this reason, it is important for families to be aware of the risks caused by unhealthy living habits (De Mestral et al. 2019). Unhealthy living habits include a poor diet and lack of exercise. Many parents are unaware of the consequences that come with poor eating choices and lack of physical activities for their children. If this issue is not addressed, more children are at risk of physical problems or cognitive delays. Families benefit from learning about healthy habits in order to create lifelong patterns of healthy living. To address the lack of awareness of healthy living among families, I created a one day workshop for parents of students who attend New Republic Elementary School in Salinas, California. These lessons will include physical routines and new nutritional approaches in order to promote healthy living among families.

Needs Statement

Parents play a significant role in their children's food intake and what physical activities their children participate in. Oftentimes, nutritional meals are replaced with processed foods and physical activities are substituted by digital outlets, such as, computer games, mobile phones or video games. If these routines continue, it can negatively impact children's cognitive development or cause physical illnesses. Children benefit from learning healthy living practices in order to create lifelong habits of healthy living. Some helpful areas that will be discussed throughout this project in order to increase knowledge of healthy living is nutrition, exercise, parent support and the importance of healthy living.

According to Haines et al. (2019), healthy eating habits have a major positive influence on the development of children, nourishing their physical as well as mental health. A healthy and balanced diet for children ensures the fact that they consume the essential nutrients, vitamins and minerals which in turn make them physically fit. Apart from this, a healthy diet makes children less prone to get affected by many diseases by the process of boosting their immune systems. It is important that healthy eating habits are initiated from childhood which in the later years would get continued with practice. Healthy eating habits not only better the physical health of children but also have a major positive influence on the mental faculties by providing an overall cognitive development. Stating a Levi-Strauss quote from the article by Haines et al. (2019), “foods are chosen not because they are ‘good to eat’ but because they are ‘good to think’”. Proper healthy diet influences positivity in the ideas and thoughts. In the case of children, this has a significant effect in the early years, allowing them to perceive the accurate eating choices. The effect of healthy food further causes the mind to allow tension or stress. In such cases, these habits and simultaneous stress stay within affecting their health. This is where healthy eating habits become absolutely necessary for both their physical as well as cognitive development.

According to Dervishaj et al. (2021), healthy eating habits consist of a variety of consumptions. First, this includes an adequate consumption of essential nutrient energy matter, that is, fats and carbohydrates for the purpose of meeting energy requirements. Secondly, a decent consumption of essential building matter, that is, proteins. Next, a sufficient consumption of essential protective substances, that is, minerals and vitamins. Lastly, a suitable consumption of water for proper digestion as well as cell transport. According to de Mestral et al. (2019), healthy eating consists of any kind of diet that includes high intakes of fruits, vegetables, legumes, whole grains, seeds and nuts. Healthy diet should have low or absolutely no intakes of

food that have added sugar, beverages that are sugar sweetened and processed meat. For a diet to get qualified as healthy enough, there should be an emphasis on vegetables, fruits, low fat or fat-free milk and other milk products, and whole grains. Protein food like beans, peas, seeds and nuts, soy products, seafood, poultry eggs and lean meats should be present in such a diet.

According to de Mestral et al. (2019), there is certainly widespread knowledge about healthy diet. However, adults, in this case the parents, are often reluctant to follow such healthy behavior. This article focuses on the main obstacles associated with healthy eating in the behavioral patterns of children and parents. These obstacles include taste preferences, time constraints, high expenses related to food and low availability of food products that promote healthy nutrition. According to Mc Morrow (2016), time related barriers pertaining to the concept of busy lifestyle and barriers associated with economic conditions making healthy diet practices less affordable are major obstacles in the case of the parents. According to the article by Haines et al. (2019), children are more prone to get drawn towards junk food and other unhealthy food practices than to persist with healthy food options. A major barrier gets created when the parents themselves do not follow healthy eating habits. This acts as a major negative influence on the children. Apart from these influences, one of the major factors acting as a negative influence on the cognitive abilities of the children is the status of not eating together as a family. Not eating together due to time related issues can certainly cause obstacles in the healthy eating habits of children.

According to Alves and Alves (2018), physical exercise has certain positive effects on the physical as well as cognitive development of children. There are several advantages associated with physical exercises from the early childhood years. This makes physical exercise a habit and gets maintained throughout bringing possible advantages related to physical and cognitive

development. One of the most important advantages is the prevention of disease. Physical exercise increases the immunity in children making their bodies less prone to diseases. Physical exercise has a major contribution to the ideal shaping of the muscle tissues as well as bones in children if practiced from an early age. Physical exercise has a positive effect on the mind, making a child's concentration powers increase with less stress or nervousness. This also builds the confidence of the children making them more active which they ought to be in their childhood. This in turn significantly contributes to their cognitive development affecting positively towards their studies and their ability of perceiving various things around them. According to Somerset and Hoare (2018), the most important obstacle in the regular habit of physical exercise for children is certainly the lack of motivation. This calls for a major role on part of the parents motivating children to take part in sports activities and indulge in physical exercise. This is related to the obstacle of the lack of interest pertaining to physical exercise among friends and family members. This has a negative influence on the regular habits of the children. Other factors working as obstacles include lack of time and lack of equipment or other resources. The obstacle relating to lack of time gets related with the study routines and the present-day digitalization. The rigid study routines are already major barriers in the exercising habits of children. Besides this, the time that was earlier available for sport or physical exercise has now been replaced with mobile phones and computer games. This relates to the parental approach. If a parental approach doesn't influence physical exercise and allows children to indulge in computer games or mobile phones to keep them busy can eventually put children at risk for physical illnesses or cognitive delays. This makes physical exercise and sports activities options for children that are hardly opted for.

According to Lopez et al. (2018), parents have an important role to play in the healthy eating habits of children as well as their habits of regular physical exercise. The healthy eating habits are to be regularly influenced on the children by the parents. Besides this, it is important that parents make their children go through a practice of regular physical exercise and let them indulge in sports activities. This comes with the obvious present-day obstacle of digitalization which has made children opt for mobile phones and computer games rather than get involved in sport activities and exercise habits. Parents will have to ensure that their children opt for healthy habits which in turn would shape their physical as well as cognitive development. According to Haines et al. (2019), another major factor that contributes to healthy eating habits in children and should be continuously looked after by parents is the habit of eating together. Parents must make sure that the family eats together which in turn has a positive influence on the children making them opt for healthy choices. Although, we must consider the fact that some families can not have family dinners together due to long work hours. Many parents have busy schedules, but it is essential to create some sort of dinner routine. This can be a small change, such as, setting one or two days a week to have a meal together. Parents are role models that can influence their children's daily routines simply by initiation, modeling and interactions. Moreover, this has a positive effect on the mental health of the children allowing them proper cognitive development.

According to De Mestral et al. (2019), the most important challenges faced by parents in promoting the healthy lifestyle of their children are taste preferences, time constraints, and high expenses related to food and low availability of food products that are actually healthy. These are general barriers in the healthy eating habits of adults which further get transferred to their children. Parents face a major barrier with their busy schedules which often lead them to failures pertaining to the care for the healthy lifestyle of their children.

Healthy habits start in the household and parents play a role in their children's development of healthy routines. Although achieving a healthy lifestyle has its barriers, there are countless reasons why it is necessary for families. Solutions include working together as a family to incorporate nutritional meals and participate in daily physical activities. The workshop I tend to show at New Republic Elementary School is meant to educate parents on the importance of healthy living and how healthy living is attainable. The purpose is to educate parents of ways to incorporate nutrition and exercise in order to promote overall healthy living. The goal is to use family involvement in order to increase healthy lifestyles for children and families.

Theory

The theory that applies to my project is Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory. Developmentally, children are in Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory due to his claims based on individuals learning from one another by engaging in the learning process. This theory application involves cognitive development that is based on social interactions. According to Turuk (2008), Vygotsky claims that a person's cognitive development is largely influenced by their surrounding culture and socio-cultural environment. Early stages involve children depending predominantly on parents who tell them what to do, how to do it and what not to do. This pertains to the transformation that children gain knowledge through interactions with others and internalizes the knowledge into personal values. Another claim is how cognitive tools support children's developing mental abilities. According to Turuk (2008), this is where children begin to understand the world and themselves. These tools are used as aids to problem solving and social and mental activity is organized through cultural artefacts. One last concept is the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). According to the article by Turke (2008), the ZPD is the gap between a child's competence level and their potential development level. This claim can help determine a

child's mental functions that have not yet matured and where the transition from interpsychological to intrapsychological functioning occurs.

My topic involves children learning through interaction, communication and observations from parents. Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory implies how the role of parents use cognitive tools needed for development and learning for young children throughout my project. For example, by parents emphasizing nutritional meals, children learn from parents by role modeling and imitation. This theory also emphasizes the influences of cultural and social contexts in learning and supports how children's mental abilities are developed naturally through social interactions. For example, these interactions can be physical, such as bike riding or sport activities. From nutrition to exercise, parents act as a role model that children eventually develop from. This applies to my topic because it supports the model of learning and how parents have an active role in their children's development.

Consideration of Diversity

I will implement my project at New Republic Elementary School in Salinas, California. According to the School Accountability Report Card (SARC; 2019-2020), New Republic Elementary has a total enrollment of 591 students. Of those students, 10.3% are White, 79.5% are Hispanic or Latino, 0.2% are of two or more races, 1.7% are African American, 3.0% are Asian, 3.7% are Filipino, 0.2% are American Indian and 0.5% are Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander. Additionally, 62.40% are socioeconomically disadvantaged and 0.20% of students are homeless. These demographics show that the majority of the students are Hispanic or Latino, therefore I expect my participants to be of this ethnicity. The Salinas Valley is one of the most productive agricultural regions in California, therefore I would expect some participants to have some sort of labor job that consists of long working hours. My project will be given in English, therefore the participants must be proficient in this language in order to participate throughout these lessons and understand the content. I would

expect my participants to be of various socioeconomic demographics. Also, not all students have the same support, help, materials or access to resources at home. This project is designed for parents of all grades at this elementary school.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the project, parents will be able to:

1. Describe benefits how healthy eating and exercise can influence children's development
2. Name two strategies for incorporating nutritional meals in daily diet
3. Identify three strategies to incorporate exercise into everyday activities
(example: bike rides, walks to the store, jump rope)

Methods

Participants

The location of this project will be in Salinas, California at New Republic Elementary School. This is a public school based in the suburbs, with a combination of lower and working class families. The number of participants will range from 6-12 parents of New Republic Elementary School students. This area consists of predominantly Hispanic or Latinos along with other ethnicities. English is the primary language spoken at this school. This lesson will consist of a one day workshop divided into three sessions.

Procedures and Materials

The first session of the workshop involves describing why it is important to embrace a healthy living lifestyle in order to influence children's development. I will present a Google slide presentation that focuses on the overall importance of obtaining lifelong healthy living habits to

live a fulfilled life. The main point that will be discussed during session one is the benefits that are caused by nutrition and exercise to influence children's development. These benefits include improved sleep regulation, stronger bones, better mood, higher energy levels and increased quality of life. I will also cover the risks of unhealthy lifestyles and how healthy living may lower the risk of cancer, cardiovascular disease and cognitive delays. See Appendix A.

The second session of the workshop will consist of naming two strategies for incorporating nutritional meals in everyday life. I will also explain ways families can work together to develop healthy meals the whole family will enjoy. These strategies include families cooking together, going grocery shopping together, eating together or eating slowly. This section focuses on nutrition and healthy eating choices. I will explain in a Google Slide presentation, the benefits of a nutritional diet, propose healthy meal samples and give examples of nutritional snacks. This will include healthy alternatives, substitutions and various recommendations parents can find healthy groceries. See Appendix B.

The last session of the workshop I will identify three strategies to incorporate exercise into everyday activities. I will first start by creating a Google Slide demonstrating the importance of physical activity. Along with the explanation, I will include the benefits and motive for daily physical activities. I will focus on encouraging family involvement in physical activities and the potential outcomes that come along while doing so. I will propose ideas to incorporate family physical activities and give examples families can adopt. A few examples include going on walks together, bike riding and playing sports together. Parents will also brainstorm in groups on ways to incorporate exercise in everyday routines/activities. See Appendix C.

Results

Project could not be conducted. Results could not be obtained due to COVID-19.

Discussion

Discussion could not be completed due to COVID-19.

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Appendices

Methods Remove

Appendix A

Google Slide: Importance of Obtaining Lifelong Healthy Living Habits that Influence Children's Development

Importance of Obtaining Lifelong Healthy Habits

- Children benefit from learning healthy living practices in order to create lifelong habits of healthy living
- Healthy habits have a major positive influence on the development of children, nourishing their physical and mental health
- **Benefits:** Improve sleep, strengthen bones, support brain development, improves mood, triggers higher energy, boosts immunity and improves the overall quality of life

*Appendix B**Google Slide: Incorporating Nutritional Meals*

Incorporating Nutritional Meals

Risks for living an unhealthy lifestyle, without nutritional meals and an inadequate amount of exercise. A healthy and balanced diet for children ensures the fact that they consume the essential nutrients, vitamins and minerals which in turn make them physically fit.

- **Illnesses:** Increases the risk of cancer, cardiovascular disease, obesity, type 2 diabetes, low immunity, increase infections, high cholesterol and high blood pressure
- **Cognitive Delays:** Low concentration, less energy, poor brain development, poor academic performance/less interest for learning, slow language and fine motor development

Haines et al. (2019)

Incorporating Nutritional Meals

Family bonding together to make healthy meals

Strategies:

- Cooking together
- Going grocery shopping together (give children choices)
- Create a cookbook/share recipes
- Picnics
- Expose Children to a variety of food so they figure out what they like
- Creativity: Mickey Mouse pancakes or star shaped apples



Incorporating Nutritional Meals



Snacks and Substitutes Examples:

- Bananas and walnuts
- Yogurt replace ice cream
- Smoothies replace juices
- Whole wheat pasta instead of white pasta
- Quinoa instead of rice
- Coconut oil instead of regular oil
- Sweet potato fries instead of french fries

Appendix C

Google Slide: Physical Activities

Importance of Physical Activity

Physical exercise increases the immunity in children making their bodies less prone to diseases and has a positive effect on the mind, making a child's concentration powers increase with less stress and more confidence.

Benefits for Physical Activities

- Improves muscle strength
- Boosts Problem solving skills
- Increases bone density
- Reduces stress and anxiety
- Increases academic performance
- Improves coordination and motor skills
- Increases self-esteem and confidence
- Reduces the risk of any chronic diseases

Family Physical Activities

Family Activities:

- Hiking
- Going to the park
- Bike Riding
- Tennis
- Walks
- Bowling
- Beach activities (flying kites; tug-a-war)



Extra Curricular Activities:

- Dancing
- Swimming
- Gymnastics
- Karate
- Sports (Basketball, Baseball, Soccer, etc.)



Discussion

During breakout groups, parents will also brainstorm on ways to incorporate exercise in everyday routines/activities.

Appendix D

Capstone Presentation for Promoting Healthy Living Among Families

Promoting Healthy Living Among Families

Elise Cabrera

Human Development and Family Science
California State University Monterey Bay

Introduction

Topic: Promoting healthy living among families

Project: Educating parents on the benefits of healthy living habits...

Why?

If this issue is not addressed, it can negatively impact children's cognitive development or cause physical illnesses.



Needs Statement

Problem: There is a lack of healthy living among families and many families are not aware of the risk of unhealthy living habits.

Families benefit from learning about healthy habits in order to create lifelong habits of healthy living and wellness.



Needs Statement

Importance:

- The role of parents in children's healthy lifestyles
- The effects of healthy eating on children's development (physical, cognitive, etc.)
- The importance of daily physical exercise

Small habits make a difference in children's life in order to promote healthy living and there are many ways to improve a healthy lifestyle in order to prevent childhood illnesses and cognitive delays.

Theory

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory

Individuals learning from one another by engaging in the learning process.

Vygotsky claims that a person's cognitive development is largely influenced their surrounding culture and socio-cultural environment.

- Social interactions
- Cognitive development



Learning Outcomes

By the end of the project, student participants will be able to:

1. Describe the benefits how healthy eating and exercise can influence children's development
2. Name two strategies for incorporating nutritional meals in daily diet
3. Identify three strategies to incorporate exercise into everyday activities



Methods

Location: New Republic Elementary School in Salinas, California

Targeted Area: Parents

Number of participants will range from 6-12 adults

Sociodemographics: Male and female parents of hispanic descent, along with other ethnicities



Methods (cont.)

Procedures and Materials

One-day workshop divided into three sessions:

- First Session: How a healthy eating lifestyle influences children's development (physically and cognitively)
- Second Session: Families incorporating nutritional meals together
- Third Session: Family physical activities

*Overall importance of obtaining lifelong healthy living habits to live a fulfilled life, the importance of physical activity and the benefits of a nutritional diet

Results

Due to Covid-19, I was unable to implement this portion of my project.

Conclusion

This project serves high importance and can benefit a variety of families. I look forward to presenting this project to families I work with in my professional career.

Thank you

Questions?



Elise Cabrera