



Teaching Children Health Skills

Parents and professionals are integral in teaching children to prevent illness and promote health. Children can learn the basics of caring for themselves at a young age. Skills such as washing hands, putting on a coat, using a tissue, and eating healthy foods should be encouraged consistently and in a variety of ways. This article includes ideas for teaching health skills.

Explain Healthy Behavior – If children understand germs cause illness and eating different foods gives them energy to play, they are more likely to follow healthy practices. Explain in simple language why children should wear coats, wash their hands, and exercise. This can be done through books, class activities, or conversations while teaching children a skill.

Use Visuals – Use a reminder in the form of pictures, drawings, or words to help children remember to flush, wash hands, get a coat, or throw tissues away. Visuals can be used to remind children of sequences such as hand washing or individual steps such as flushing the toilet. In addition to using paper visuals, use real world examples. For example, show children their dirty hands as a concrete visual indicating it is time to wash their hands or show them the snow outside a window as a way to demonstrate it is cold and coats should be worn.



From *Using the Bathroom*

Make Health Memorable and Fun – Teach children to enjoy health by making it fun. Have children sing Happy Birthday while rubbing soap on their hands. This is a way for children to judge the appropriate amount of time for hand washing. When encouraging children to try new foods, have them participate in making meals and snacks. If they are involved in creating the meals, they are more likely to try new things.

Plan a Variety of Health Related Activities – Children learn the importance of health skills by seeing them in a variety of formats. Conversations, books, art activities, games, and literacy projects on wellness are examples of fun ways to promote health. Keep health books in the literacy center and hang health focused posters in the classroom, cafeteria, and other school locations.

Provide Reinforcement – Verbally reinforce children for being healthy. Comments such as, “I like how Johnny got a tissue and threw it away after he used it,” tell children exactly what they did correctly and remind them about healthy behavior. Teachers can give Healthy Student awards when they see students trying new foods, remembering their coats, washing their hands when they are dirty, and following other healthy practices.

Be a Role Model – By modeling healthy behavior, adults provide multiple opportunities for children to see skills performed. Point out what is being done and why. For example, “I am going to get a snack ready. I better wash my hands before I touch the food so I do not pass germs to other people.”

Prepare Children for New Experiences – Going to the doctor or dentist can be a very scary experience for children. Prepare children for these experiences by reading books, showing doctor’s/dentist’s equipment (in their toys or in a dramatic play area), or having guest speakers visit the classroom. When children know what to expect (e.g. opening their mouth, testing their reflexes) they will be more comfortable with the situation.

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