Helping Children and Adolescents Improve Physical Activity Behaviors

✓ LEADERSHIP
✓ MOTIVATION
SKILLS
Factors Affecting Physical Activity Levels

► To promote physical activity in children and adolescents, health professionals need to consider factors (e.g., personal, social, environmental) that affect children’s and adolescents’ participation.

► Health professionals also need to consider children’s and adolescents’ readiness to change, because it affects the steps that children and adolescents, and their families need to take to improve or maintain their levels of physical activity.
Factors Affecting Physical Activity Levels

The following factors affect children’s and adolescents’ physical activity levels:

- Self-efficacy
- Expectation of positive outcomes from physical activity
- Barriers that make it difficult to participate in physical activity
- Enjoyment of physical activity
Physical activity counseling can help children and adolescents do the following:

- Increase self-efficacy
- Understand the benefits of being physically active
- Reduce barriers to physical activity
- Select enjoyable activities
## The Stages of Change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. <strong>Precontemplation</strong></td>
<td>Is unaware of problem and hasn’t thought about change. Has no intention of taking the action within the next 6 months.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. <strong>Contemplation</strong></td>
<td>Intends to take action within the next 6 months.</td>
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<td>3. <strong>Preparation</strong></td>
<td>Intends to take action within the next 30 days and has taken some behavioral steps in that direction.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. <strong>Action</strong></td>
<td>Has changed overt behavior for less than 6 months.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. <strong>Maintenance</strong></td>
<td>Has changed overt behavior for more than 6 months.</td>
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Counseling

► The health professional begins physical activity counseling by assessing the child’s or adolescent’s self-efficacy, knowledge of the benefits of physical activity, perceived barriers to participation in physical activity, and stage of change.

► The health professionals needs to consider these factors, along with the medical history and family and community resources.
Stage 1: Precontemplation

**Goal:** Encourage the child or adolescent to participate in physical activity.

1. Identify the benefits of physical activity
2. Explain the benefits of physical activity as they pertain to the child or adolescent
3. Recommend that child or adolescent consider beginning some type of physical activity
1. Identify the benefits of physical activity

▶ Rationale
Children and adolescents may not be aware of the benefits of physical activity (e.g., promotes well being; helps reduce the risk of certain diseases such as coronary diseases, colon cancer, diabetes mellitus.

▶ Counseling statement
“Elena, being physically active is one of the most important things you can do to stay healthy, both physically and mentally. It can also help you build strong bones and feel energetic.”
2. Explain the benefits of physical activity as they pertain to the child or adolescent

► **Rationale**
Children and adolescents may understand that PA is good for them, but this may not be enough to convince them to become physically active. The health professional needs to personalize the benefits of PA and risks of inactivity based on the child’s, adolescent’s, and family’s health history.

► **Counseling statement**
“Charlie, participating in PA, such as walking, might help reduce your risk of developing diabetes, which your older sister has. I know that you are concerned about this, and this is a way for you to do something about it.”
3. Recommend that child or adolescent consider beginning some type of PA

► Rationale
One study found that a physician’s recommendation to exercise would be taken very seriously by more than 75% of high school students. So health professionals can influence children’s and adolescents’ attitudes toward physical activity.

► Counseling statement
“Lauren, your weight is above the recommended weight range for your age and height. If you were to begin something as simple as brisk walking for 30 minutes each day, you’d probably feel a lot better and lose the extra weight.”
Stages 2 and 3: Contemplation and Preparation

**Goal:** Help the child or adolescent develop a plan for participating in physical activity.

1. Help the child or adolescent identify the benefits of physical activity
2. Help the child or adolescent choose appropriate physical activities
3. Help the child or adolescent identify barriers to physical activity
4. Help the child or adolescent assess confidence in his or her ability to become physically active.
1. Help the child or adolescent identify the benefits of PA

► Rationale
Children and adolescents are more likely to participate in PA if they believe they will receive something in return. The health professionals need to help children and adolescents identify what they will gain by becoming physically active.

► Counseling statement
“Hilary, why are you interested in becoming physically active now? What do you hope to gain by participating in physical activity?”
2. Help the child or adolescent choose appropriate PA

► Rationale
Children and adolescents are more likely to participate in physical activity if they are involved in planning the activities and participate in ones they enjoy. The health professional needs to provide guidance on the duration, intensity, and frequency of activities.

► Counseling statement
“Beth, what types of physical activities do you enjoy? Are there any you have enjoyed in the past? If so, which ones? How much activity do you think you can handle right now?”
3. Help the child or adolescent identify barriers to PA

► Rationale
Children and adolescents may face barriers that prevent them from participating in physical activity. Identifying these barriers is the first step to overcoming them.

► Counseling statement
“John, what is keeping you from participating in physical activity (e.g., fear, embarrassment, lack of time or transportation)? If you’ve participated in physical activity before, why did you quit? What would help you participate in physical activity now?”
4. Help the child or adolescent assess confidence in his or her ability to become PA

► **Rationale**
Children and adolescents are good judges about whether they will continue to participate in physical activity. If their confidence is low, the physical activity plan may need to be revised to make it less daunting.

► **Counseling statement**
“David, on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest, how confident are you that you will continue to swim for the next three months?”
Stages 4 and 5: Action and Maintenance

**Goal:** Encourage the child or adolescent to participate regularly in physical activity.

1. Praise the child or adolescent for being physically active
2. Help the child or adolescent remain physically active
3. Help the child or adolescent identify social support
4. Help the child or adolescent assess confidence in his ability to remain physically active
1. Praise the child or adolescent for being physically active

► Rationale
Praising children and adolescents for participating in physical activity will increase the likelihood that they will participate in physical activity on regular basis.

► Counseling statement
“Susan, I am pleased that you are playing tennis regularly. I think being more physically active will really help you stay healthy.”
2. Help the child or adolescent remain physically active

► **Rationale**
Most people can become physically active for a short period of time. However, maintaining PA is more difficult. The health professionals needs to help children and adolescents identify strategies to help them remain physically active.

► **Counseling statement**
“Stan, your physical activity plan is going well. What will help you remain physically active?”
3. Help the child or adolescent identify social support

► Rationale
Social support (e.g., encouragement from friends and family, participation in physical activity with others) is crucial for helping children and adolescents remain physically active.

► Counseling statement
“Lisa, does anyone support your decision to become physically active? You may want to ask your parents to help you to stay active. Also, it may be helpful to participate in physical activity with your family and friends.”
4. Help the child or adolescent assess confidence in his ability to remain physically active

► **Rationale**
If children or adolescents are not confident in their ability to remain physically active, they are likely to get discouraged and quit. The health professionals need to help the child or adolescent to increase his confidence.

► **Counseling statement**
“Cameron, on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest, how confident are you that you will continue to participate in regular physical activity for the next 3 months?”
(An acceptable rating is 4 or 5.)
“What will help you continue?”