



The Healthy Kids Series

Springtime is the Right Time to Get Active

| BY TAMI FARAM |

Getting your kids interested in the big outdoors may not be as simple as one might think. Today's kids are enraptured by Wii, Game Boys, computers, television shows and texting. However, with a little creativity, you can engage them in activities that will get their feet moving and hearts pumping.

Go for a walk - sounds simple right? Still, not enough families are walking together. Give your kids a reason to take a walk:

- Walk before/ after dinner
- Walk to your neighborhood park
- Walk the dog
- Bring friends along on a walk
- Go on a nature walk, discovering together

Lead By Example

Parents and caregivers are the best examples. According to the Alliance for a Healthier Generation, "Parents and Guardians are key decision-makers when it comes to the nutrition, physical activity and health needs of their child." The Alliance, which is a combined effort of the American Heart Association and the Clinton Foundation, advises parents to "take advantage of healthy choices around you, and do little things that can affect your child's health in a big way." The Alliance for a Healthier Generation seeks to positively affect the places that can make a difference to a child's health, by focusing on four key areas: health care, schools, industry and kids.

So lead by example. Unglue yourself from your computer and challenge your kids to physical activity. Shoot hoops or throw a ball together. Play hopscotch with little ones, or challenge older kids to a short foot or bike, race. Combining your children's physical activities with your own, benefits the entire family.

Another way to get the family involved is to schedule high-energy activities. Plan a family vacation that includes bike riding, canoeing, swimming or hiking. Join a health club that has something for all ages. Get kids involved in tennis or swimming lessons during spring and summer months, or have them join an athletic team.

You can also create some family dance moves, play miniature golf or visit the local zoo. Or participate in a local race like the Marine Corps Marathon's Historic Half marathon held in Fredericksburg, VA each May. Even if your family cannot participate as runners, join the kids in cheering on thousands of runners who will inspire all of you to get active.

Community Projects

Physical activities also can be discovered outside of sports and recreation. Get your children involved in a park cleanup or a park building project. Rake leaves, mow grass or pick weeds in your yard or help a neighbor. Have the family participate in a community or neighborhood planting project. Or, assist your kids in holding a carwash or helping your school with its spring carnival.

Ask Questions

When thinking about your children's physical activities at school, it never hurts to ask what more can be done to keep kids active in gym class or during after-school care. The American Heart Association recommends, "All children age two and older should participate in at least 30 minutes of enjoyable, moderate-intensity physical activities every day. These activities should be developmentally appropriate and varied."

According to the Alliance for a Healthier Generation, "physical fitness should be measured at the beginning and end of the school year, and goals should be established for each child." The Alliance suggests that parents should "encourage their school boards to emphasize skills students can use for the rest of their lives."

Choose Fitness-Oriented Gifts

Involving your kids in activity early in their lives may also lead to a change in their habits as they grow into adulthood. Consider diverting your kids from the computer, television or even their homework directly after school, and have them engage in outdoor activity for thirty minutes to an hour. They may have more energy to complete their schoolwork after dinner. Another way you can help change their habits is by purchasing gifts that are geared toward activity.


- Tennis racket
- Hula hoop
- Jump rope
- Baseball bat/ glove
- Swim gear
- Golf lessons
- Soccer goal or equipment
- Volleyball set
- Badminton
- Skis
- Running shoes/ gear
- Membership in the local YMCA

Setting Goals

While you're busy helping your kids get active, remember to also help them set goals. Whether your child wants to finish a race, learn how to play tennis or plant a garden, he'll be thrilled when he accomplishes that goal. You are the best inspiration to help your kids set goals, even though it often takes time to meet them.

The Marine Corps Marathon is one organization that has been helping kids set goals by getting them involved in running and walking activities with their parents, school mates, siblings and friends.

The Marine Corps Marathon offers activities for kids of all ages throughout the year, including the Semper Fred 5K race in Fredericksburg, VA in May; Run Amuck and Kids Run Amuck mud challenge races at Quantico, VA, in August; and the annual Healthy Kids Fun Run in October, 2010. For more information about these races, go to www.marinemarathon.com.

Whatever activity choices you make, your family is sure to benefit. Sometimes the simplest lifestyle changes can make all the difference - and springtime is a great time to start! 



Articles in the Healthy Kids Series are presented by The Marine Corps Marathon's Healthy Kids Fun Run and other family-oriented running events occurring this year at www.marinemarathon.com Tami Faram is the Community Relations Coordinator for the Marine Corps Marathon. No federal or Marine Corps endorsement is implied.