Best Practices for Physical Activity in Early Care and Education Settings

These best practices represent current public health research and national health recommendations for children in early care and education settings. Best practices often exceed state requirements. These practices are not meant to be used as rules or requirements for your early childhood program, but are instead intended to serve as a guide and measurement tool to help set goals or create policies that encourage healthy lifestyles.

Active Play and Inactive Time

- Provide children with age appropriate opportunities for physical activity:
  - Infants should have supervised tummy time every day when they are awake.
  - Toddlers should be allowed 60 to 90 minutes per 8 hour day for moderate to vigorous physical activity.
  - Preschoolers should be allowed 90 to 120 minutes per 8 hour day for moderate vigorous physical activity.
- Provide adult-led physical activity to preschool children for a total of 60 minutes per day.
- Provide outdoor active play time year-round two or more times per day totaling 60 to 90 minutes. (Refer to the Child Care Aware® of North Dakota Child Care Weather Guide for adjusted times based on temperatures. This guide can be downloaded at www.ndchildcare.org.)
- Never withhold active play time from children.
- Ensure that infant's, toddler's and preschooler's movement is not restricted for more than 15 minutes at one time (seated position, swings, exersaucers, etc.). A least restrictive environment is encouraged at all times.
- Limit screen time for children in child care to no more than 30 minutes per week and avoid screen time for children younger than 2.
  - The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends limiting children's total media time to no more than one or two hours per day.
  - Because most children get too much screen time outside of the early childhood setting, providers should carefully plan screen time during the week for educational or physical activity use only.

Terms to Know & Use

Active Play- engaging in large muscle movements such as dancing, acting out a story, or throwing a ball. Children of all age groups engage in various forms of active play, from the exploration of objects and toys by the infant and toddler to the active movement and sports of the older child.

Screen Time - time spent in front of a screen including televisions, computers, tablets, smartphones, handheld game devices, and game consoles.

Inactive time - quiet time which can include reading a book, taking a nap, sitting down for meals, or coloring a picture.

Play Environment

- Make a wide variety of fixed play equipment available that accommodates the needs of all children.
- Make a large variety of portable play equipment available for children to use at the same time.
- Make outdoor play equipment freely available to all children at all times and encourage turn taking.
- Outdoor play space should include open, grassy areas and an area for wheeled toys.
- Make indoor play space available for all activities, including physical activity and movement.

Support Physical Activity

- Encourage children to be active.
- Join children in their active play.
- Provide visible support for physical activity through use of posters, pictures, and displayed books.

Physical Activity Education

- Participate, and ensure staff participates, in training opportunities on physical activity (above and beyond playground safety) two times per year or more.
- Provide routine physical activity education to support the development of emerging motor skills (tummy time, crawling, walking backwards, running, skipping, jumping, etc.).
- Offer physical activity education opportunities (flyer, newsletter, family fun event, community event, etc.) to parents two times per year or more.

Physical Activity Policy

- Create a written policy on physical activity that is available to staff and parents and routinely followed, including items from the previous four physical activity key areas.

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Sources and Resources

1. Preventing Childhood Obesity in Early Care and Education Programs, Caring for Our Children National Health and Safety Performance Standards: http://cfoc.nrckids.org/StandardView/SpcCol/Preventing_Childhood_Obesity
2. Head Start Body Start; National Center for Physical Development and Outdoor Play: www.shapeamerica.org/Standards/guidelines/earlychildhoodguidelines.cfm
3. Healthy Habits for Life Resource Kit: www.kidshealth.org/classroom/index.jsp?Grade=cc&Section=hhfl
4. Let's Move! Child Care: www.healthykidshealthyfuture.org
5. Nutrition and Physical Activity Self Assessment for Child Care (NAPSACC): www.gonapsacc.org
6. Sesame Workshop Healthy Habits for Life Website: www.sesamestreet.org/parents/topicsandactivities/toolkits/healthyhabits

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