

## A Strength-based Approach to Healthy Weight

**Y**ou are the expert on your child. The ideas below are meant to help you support your child's healthy growth and development.

Consider whether these suggestions are right for your family. If they aren't, we hope you will see the spirit of a strength-based approach and will come up with your own ways to encourage your child's healthy development. (And please share your ideas with us!)

### Recognize Your Child's Strengths<sup>1</sup>

All children have strengths. Your love and support, and your child's developing strengths, will help your child make healthy choices and become a healthy adult. Look for the following strengths in your child:

**Independence:** Is your child learning to do things on his or her own? Making decisions indepen-

dently? Problem-solving? Growing independence can help a child "own" a decision to increase their physical activity, or improve their eating habits.

**Mastery:** Does your child know she is good at certain tasks like reading, caring for a pet, or sports? Are there healthy activities he or she participates in with enthusiasm? Has she/he made progress in choosing healthy behavior, like good hygiene, exercising, controlling anger, or following family rules? Praise this progress and let them know healthy eating and activity choices can be mastered, too.

**Belonging:** Is your child making connections with friends and family? A child's best friends and family, and knowing they have people who support them, can help a child stick with healthy behaviors.



## Simple Things You Can Do To Support Your Child's Strengths and Healthy Behavior

**Offer Guidance:** Actively guide your child toward the values and skills you want for them.

- Remind your child of their strengths and that they can accomplish great things.
- Regularly discuss what you expect from them.
- Discuss your values; what you believe, and don't believe.
- Suggest ways they can pursue their interests and enhance their strengths.
- Model positive behavior. Let your kids see you learning, working, and trying new things. And show them you are making healthy physical activity and eating choices.
- Be present and supportive when things go wrong.

**Make a safe space:** It's hard to control the outside environment, but you can make your home a safe space where healthy decisions are easier.<sup>2</sup>

- Serve healthy meals for everyone, not just for the child who is trying to improve their eating habits.
- Keep healthy snacks like apples in easy reach and don't buy tempting, high-calorie, low nutrition foods like chips and cookies.
- Put the TV and video games in a room that is not welcoming, or where a glare hits the screen.
- If you designate TV time, try giving equal (or more) time for exercise.

**Get Involved:** Let your child know what they think and do matters to someone.

- Talk together often. Ask them how things are going.
- Play together and eat meals together.
- Attend their school and sporting events.
- Meet your child's friends and their parents.

**Acknowledge and Reward:** Show your child you appreciate them and enjoy being around them:<sup>3</sup>

- Ask their opinion.
- Include them in conversations.
- Encourage them to share their talents with others.
- Listen to their stories
- Go places together.
- Share their excitement.
- Tell them how proud of them you are.
- Follow them when they lead.
- Do what they like to do.
- Marvel at what they can do.
- Cheer their accomplishments.
- Believe what they say.
- Help them take a stand, and stand with them.
- Join in their adventures.
- Introduce them to people of excellence.

When things seem to be going wrong, remember... you have a great kid! No child is perfect. When things start get off track, make a list of your child's strengths to help you refocus. When you finish the list, review the strengths present or lacking and make a plan for moving forward.

And don't forget, you have strengths as a parent:

- You are the expert on your child.
- You have experiences and guidance that can help your child.
- Your child needs YOU.

*Your doctor cares about you and your child. Talk to your doctor about your questions and concerns.*



<sup>1</sup> Adapted from: Brendtro, L. K., Brokenleg, M., & Van Bockern, S. (2002). Reclaiming youth at risk: our hope for the future. Bloomington, Ind: National Educational Service.

<sup>2</sup> Adapted from: Ludwig, D., & Rostler, S. (2007). Ending the food fight: guide your child to a healthy weight in a fast food/fake food world. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

<sup>3</sup> Adapted from: Roehlkepartain, J. L. (2005). 150 ways to show kids you care = Los ninos importan. Minneapolis, Minn: Search Institute.