



ANCHOR

ACCELERATING NATIONAL COMMUNITY HEALTH OUTCOMES THROUGH REINFORCING PARTNERSHIPS

CHILD CARE PROVIDERS LEARN HOW TO GET “ACTIVE EARLY”



Young children may be full of energy, but many children fail to get the minimum hour of physical activity recommended by leading health experts, who correlate this deficiency with the nation’s childhood obesity epidemic. The American Heart Association is working with leaders from Western Dairyland Community Action Agency, Department of Health Services and Supporting Families Together Association to change this. To kick off the effort, early child care providers were provided training and the tools necessary to help increase physical activity opportunities throughout provider homes and centers. During the workshops, the trainers demonstrated how everyday objects could be used as part of active play activities, along with strategies for incorporating movement into even typically periods like “circle time” when children are required to participate in sedentary learning activities such as reading or working on a smart board. Those extra minutes of physical activity are adding up, leading to healthier children who, as a result, are able to focus on learning and sleep more soundly during their nap time.

The Challenge

The American Heart Association recommends that all children age two and older get at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity every day. Yet, 65 percent of kids fail to meet the suggested minimum. That physical inactivity is one factor why 30 percent of the children in the country are overweight or obese. Boosting activity among children can help them live longer lives by lowering their risk for developing heart disease, high blood pressure and other chronic illnesses. It also can help them grow up with higher self-esteem.



“Having soft items like the foam balls and discs gives them safe ways to actively play indoors. I have also purchased a small climber set that is indoors so that children can have a climbing option. I like that the materials can be used for all aged groups.”

– Carol Brenner, family child care provider in Eau Claire

The Solution

The American Heart Association’s Accelerating National Community Health Outcomes through Reinforcing (ANCHOR) Partnerships Program in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, collaborated with government agencies and health advocacy groups to help ensure that even the youngest children get an active start in life. ANCHOR coordinated workshops to help educate early child care providers about ways to boost physical activity in their classrooms, centers and homes. Trainers demonstrated easy-to-implement strategies that encourage dynamic movement throughout the day, whether indoors or out, using existing or inexpensive equipment like buckets, foam discs and rubber balls. The training utilized activities outlined in two resources geared toward preventing childhood obesity: “Active Play!,” a book by physical education expert Diane Craft, and “Active Early: A Wisconsin Guide for Improving Childhood Physical Activity.” Since the trainings, the American Heart Association and its partners have updated the toolkits based on provider feedback, provided technical assistance, and developed a library system into the Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies and Family Resource Centers where the training resources and tools are available for others to benefit throughout the ANCHOR communities and the State of Wisconsin.

Sustaining Success

Early child care providers and educators have the opportunity to receive up to three hours of technical assistance follow-up. They also can access the “Active Early” toolkits that feature user-friendly aids and activity idea lists. These kits are available for sale, but also can be checked out from the libraries of various Child Care Resources and Referral Agencies.

Policy, System and Environmental Change

The training workshops coordinated by ANCHOR prompted both systemic and environmental changes. Teachers are now adding more physical activity into their daily plans through specific, teacher-led exercises and by incorporating movement during transition periods between class activities. On an environmental level, the “Active Early” toolkits have led to the placement of various objects throughout a child care home or classroom to encourage lively play.

Results

The training initiative has helped 113 Wisconsin child care providers and educators, and 1,500 children, learn fun and developmentally appropriate ways to boost physical activities in their home- and center-based setting. Brittany Benner, a family child care provider in Amery, described how she engaged the young children in her care one day when cold, rainy weather kept them indoors. “We pulled out the big four square balls and some different sized laundry baskets and hampers and had the kids try to bounce the balls into the baskets,” she said. “We spent an hour giggling and running off energy, bouncing balls and cheering each other on.” Amy Germain, director of Above All Beginnings Child Care in Osceola, said the training has proved effective for every age group at her center, from toddlers to school-age students. They now plan to hold an “Active Early” Parent Night, featuring stations where parents can practice different activities they can enjoy with their children at home. “Thank you for the opportunity to keep improving our center!” Germain said.

Get Involved

Various resources are available to encourage active and mindful play. Learn more through Dianne Craft’s book, [Active Play!](#) or download a copy of Wisconsin’s [“Active Early” booklet](#) through the state Department of Health Services.

