

Parents, Get Your Children Moving!

**By Janet Collins, Ph.D., Acting Director
Division of Adolescent and School Health
National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion,
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**

Hispanic/Latino parents have so many reasons to share cultural pride with their children: the richness of their culture, devotion to family, work and core values, the beauty of the language and the warmth and friendliness of the people. Among these messages is urgent information that Hispanic/Latino parents also need to convey to their children: *Ponte las Pilas!*

Children benefit from being physically active and involved in organized activities. Active children tend to be more confident, have a greater sense of well-being, experience better health and be less involved in risky behaviors such as tobacco and drug use.¹

However, children, and in particular Hispanic/Latino youth, aren't moving. Since 1980 the number of children who are overweight has doubled. Many Hispanic/Latino children are considered to be overweight.² Research studies also consistently find that Hispanic/Latino youth in grades 5 through 8 are less active than Caucasian youth. Access to community programs is a key factor to a child's involvement in activity. Other factors include parents supporting their child's interests, and the child's sense of their own ability.

Why Children Aren't Moving

There are many factors contributing to sedentary (inactive) behavior. Research shows that Hispanic/Latino children watch four hours of TV per day, replacing time that could be spent doing positive activities. These children tend to have greater body fat than those who watch less than two hours per day.³ Moreover, children with a TV in their bedroom watch an additional 4.6 hours per week. More Hispanic/Latino children (50 percent) have a TV in their bedrooms than Caucasian children (20 percent).⁴

Many children are choosing to spend their time sitting down in front of a TV, computer or video game, rather than outside playing with friends and family.

How Parents Can Help?

Children can't get moving alone. Obstacles such as access to transportation, family commitments and the need for adult supervision keep many kids from having the chance to participate in activities. Children need support from their parents to find activities that are right for them – and to make activity an important part of their daily lives.

In today's busy world, finding time for activity can be difficult, but it's important. Here are a few things one can do:

- Start by talking with other parents about physical activity
- Organize a rotating schedule with friends and family that allows you all to share supervision or provide transportation to the group of children in your neighborhood
- Talk to trusted teachers and religious leaders to find out about quality programs in your community

- Ask your children what they like to do and are interested in trying
- Help your children find programs where they can enjoy activities and spend time with youth who have similar interests
- Participate in activities with your children and support their interests

Experts offer additional ways that parents can engage children in activity:

- Encourage children to be moderately active for at least 60 minutes on most days of the week
- Be physically active role models
- Set limits on the amount of time the family watches TV and plays video games
- Don't allow a TV in your child's bedroom
- Create family activities that involve physical activity such as hiking, walking or playing with a ball
- Volunteer to help your children's after-school physical activity programs
- Build activity into your daily life: walk to the corner store and take the stairs

Benefits of Activity

Participation in physical activity decreases the risk of developing heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, and colon cancer.⁵ Furthermore, it appears that the positive impact of physical activity on mental health may increase a student's capacity to learn. Finally, physically active and socially involved children are more likely to be active healthy and successful adults.

VERB.™ Ponte las Pilas.

VERB is a campaign that aims to get 9-13 year-olds, also known as "tweens," to be more active. VERB motivates tweens to find their own VERB or try a new one, whether it's running, playing soccer, dancing, or doing any other positive physical activity they already enjoy or want to try. VERB is made possible by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Let's work together to encourage and support children's participation in positive physical activity and give the Hispanic/Latino community yet another reason to be proud.

For more information, visit www.VERBparents.com

ADDENDUM

FOOTNOTES:

1. A Report to the President on Physical Activity from the HHS and Education Secretaries, 2000. Washington: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2000. Available at: http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/physicalactivity/promoting_health/pdfs/ppar.pdf
2. National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey III , 1988-94
3. Annenberg School of Public Policy, 2000 Philadelphia PA
4. Journal of the American Medical Association, 1998; 279: 959-60
5. HHS. *Healthy People 2010. 2nd ed. With Understanding and Improving Health and Objectives for Improving Health. 2 vols.* Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, November 2000