

Remote Control Alternatives: Ways to Inspire, Lead, and Get Active

When television, video games, and Internet surfing get the best of children, even the best of parents may not know how to effectively sway their children away from an unhealthy, sedentary lifestyle.

That's why the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is committed to informing parents about the importance of becoming become physically active role models.

The CDC created the **VERB.™ It's what you do.** campaign to encourage children between the ages of 9 and 13 to get moving toward a healthy, positive lifestyle. Encouraging parents to become active role models for children is a pivotal part of the campaign because the CDC understands that creating the proper environment for children to become active is an important step toward inspiring them to make physical and group activities an integral part of their daily routine. The campaign also stresses that parents assess the activity interest of children and seek opportunities that match those interests.

Today's children reportedly spend more than six hours watching television, DVDs or videos; playing video games; using the computer; or surfing the Internet each day.¹ Parents are urged to consider the following activities to help turn TVs off and children on to more proactive fun.

- ✓ Plan family vacations and outdoor adventures that allow children to be active by exploring new environments and activities such as hiking, climbing, and fishing.
- ✓ Assess the physical activity patterns of children to help refer them to the appropriate physical activity programs. Several options, such as drama, dancing, karate, nature exploration and gymnastics are available though local park districts, schools, and community groups.

¹ Woodward, Emory H., *Media in the Home 2000: The Fifth Annual Survey of Parents and Children*, The Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania, 2000.

- ✓ Get together with other parents in the neighborhood and organize a block party for area children. Try these fun activities: karaoke, tag football, egg relay, decorated bicycle parades, ping-pong or hula-hoop challenges.
- ✓ Turn yard work into fun. Encourage children to help plan and design an obstacle course in the yard. Wheelbarrow and leaf races can keep children stay active while they have fun. Or, let children test their art skills by painting flowerpots with exciting designs. Their favorite flowers can then be planted in the pot.
- ✓ Be safe when heading outdoors. Proper helmets and safety pads are important to remember when participating in physical activities such as bicycling, skateboarding, and rollerblading. Head to the local sporting store to learn the correct way to wear a helmet and to get the proper fit.
- ✓ Don't be afraid to laugh at yourself. Children will enjoy trying new activities if parents join in the fun, try jumping rope, tag, charades, and hip-hop dancing to a music video. Parents and children can laugh together, share a growing skill, and even bond.
- ✓ Identify times of the day your family spends the most time watching TV and fill in the calendar with alternate activities during those times. Activities could include family board games, listening to music, arts and crafts, and walks to the park.
- ✓ Decrease screen time. Parents can transition their children from the screen to more positive activities by encouraging alternative entertainment such as reading, creative play and athletics. Other possibilities for decreasing screen time include taking trips to the community center to play basketball, volunteering to help plan a neighborhood block party or assisting local seniors in a pottery project.
- ✓ Bring the outdoors in. Gardening can help foster children's imaginations. Invite children to plant a garden with their favorite vegetable and flowers. Children can use plastic cups as flowerpots, setting them in a windowsill to grow.

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