

“Stewardship – Temple (Body)”

Did you know that part of being a good steward is learning to take care of our own bodies? Today, we are going to talk about three areas where we can teach our children how to take care of their bodies: Food choices, exercise, and rest.

Healthy Food Choices

Perhaps one of a parent’s biggest challenges is how to compete with media when it comes to helping children make healthy food choices. The food marketing experts are great when it comes to appealing to our little ones’ eyes with the colorful cartoon characters that are pictured on food packaging. Take special notice in the cereal aisle the next time you go into your local grocery store. Look at the packaging of the granola cereal and compare it to the sugary cereal. Which would appeal to you if you were a little one? Look at the colors on the packaging. Notice the graphics. It is indeed hard to compete with that!

Healthy Food Choices

1. Accept that each person is different and unique, including your child.

Let’s be honest and admit that there are some foods that we do not enjoy or like as adults. The same is true of your children. If they do not like one green vegetable, try another. After all, your goal may be to provide the nutrients that are in green vegetables. You can still achieve your goal and respect your child’s individual tastes.



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2. Talk about food.

Toddlers are learning colors, shapes, and textures, and food is the perfect teaching tool. During conversations, discuss what a healthy food is. Start with the basics. Instead of classifying food into good and bad, teach them to think of a healthy food as something that will help them grow, get tall, become strong, play more, or run fast. Point out the various colors in vegetables and fruits. Make it a game to see how many different colors they can put on their plate.

3. Get your child involved in food selection and meal preparation.

- Take your child grocery shopping and allow them to select a vegetable or a fruit they want to try.
- Make a habit of trying one different food or recipe every week.
- Children like to help; let your child wash produce, set the table, toss the salad, or anything safe for their age and ability level. Even young children can help do something to contribute to the meal preparation. Yes, they may make messes but it’s all a part of learning.

4. Eat at meal-times only.

While it’s tempting to turn the television on or feed your child when he/she is playing, try to avoid doing so. Avoid developing the habit of eating between meals. Try a glass of water instead. Little ones are active bundles of energy so they may need carrot sticks or raisins to calm the hunger. Just remember to limit any snacks and, if they are needed, make them healthy.



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5. Eat meals together as a family at the table.

For younger children, bring the highchair close to the table, or remove the tray and let your child use the family table. Take the time to sit down together and reconnect as a family. Talk about the highs and lows of the day. Turn off the cell phones and the television and just enjoy each other’s company.

6. Be a positive role model.

Your actions and attitudes matter. Children who fear trying new foods have parents who do too, and children who are picky with vegetables have parents who don’t vary their vegetable intake. Children want what their parents have, so make sure you are eating healthy foods to nourish your body too.

7. Don’t reward eating a healthy food with something that is not.

“If you don’t eat your vegetables, you can’t have dessert.” That implies your child has to eat something that is not tasty in order to get something that is sweet and delicious. This does not encourage your child to love eating vegetables. Instead, make fruits and vegetables festive, reward with fun activities or special attention, and offer dessert occasionally, detached from eating any other food.



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8. Be patient and continue to offer a variety of foods.

When your child refuses to eat something, ask why. What caused the response: was it taste, smell, texture, or temperature? Offer it in different cooking methods, shapes, temperatures, and offer something that looks good. If they do not like it cooked one way then try another. Don't give up. For example, they may not like cooked carrots but they may love raw carrot sticks with a healthy dip.

Exercise

When most adults think about exercise, they think about working out in the gym on a treadmill or lifting weights. But for children, exercise means running, jumping, and playing. Children get exercise when they play hide-and-seek, while riding bikes, or when playing a game of tag.

According to research, children who are physically active will:

- have stronger muscles and bones
- have a leaner body because exercise helps control body fat
- be less likely to become overweight
- decrease the risk of developing type 2 diabetes
- possibly lower blood pressure and blood cholesterol levels
- have a better outlook on life



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Besides enjoying the health benefits of regular exercise, children who are physically fit sleep better and are better able to handle physical and emotional challenges. The truth is that you will experience the same benefits from exercise as your children do. In other words, if you exercise with your child it is a win-win for both of you. So, get up and get moving with your little one.

Rest

Just as important as exercise are the times for rest. Many young children are full of energy and so exercise may actually be easier to obtain than rest. It may be hard to get your little one to slow down. They seem to be one little ball of energy that always wants to be on the go.

Here are some tips to help your child relax at night and catch all the zzz’s they need:

1. Be consistent with bed-time.

Put your child to bed at the same time every night; this helps their little body get into a routine.

2. Follow a bedtime routine.

This could include taking a warm bath, getting into clean pajamas, having family worship, and saying bedtime prayers.



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3. Cut out all drinks that contain caffeine.

These include some sodas and other drinks, like ice-tea.

4. Don't allow any form of media in your child's room.

Research shows that children who have access to media in their rooms sleep less.

5. Don't watch television shows or movies close to bedtime.

These can sometimes make it hard to fall asleep. Instead, do activities that calm. Play soft music or do other calming activities.

6. Don't exercise just before going to bed.

Exercise earlier in the day. It will help your child sleep better but it needs to be done earlier in the day and not just before bedtime.

7. Teach your child that their bed or crib is just for sleeping.

The bed is not for playing games, playing with technology gadgets. It is a place to relax. Remove things from the child's reach that excite. That way, you'll train your child's little body to associate their bed with sleep.

8. Assure them they you are close by.

Tuck your child in bed with their favorite stuffed toy or blanket. Remind them that they have been fed, they have had a drink of water, prayers have been said, and it is time to sleep. And remind them that Jesus and their angel are right beside them.



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Home is the place where children learn healthy habits that will carry them throughout their lifetime. A healthy lifestyle involves teaching children to make healthy choices in what they eat, getting plenty of exercise, and making sure they get an adequate amount of rest.



North American Division
Family Ministries
Children's Ministries

9705 Patuxent Woods Drive
Columbia, MD 21046

Phone: 443-391-7200
www.nadfamily.org
www.childmin.com



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