



REPORT to PARENTS

RP 30:7

Keep Your Children Mentally and Physically Fit

Healthy kids—that's what every family wants. Here are some important things to think about in terms of your child's mental and physical health.

Mental Health

They need their sleep. Children need 10 hours of sleep each night to be well rested and ready to do their best. Keep the TV out of their bedroom and have a firm "lights off" policy, with a little flexibility on Friday and Saturday nights. Without enough sleep, they simply can't cope with the physical and mental work of being a kid.

Keep the lines open. As busy as you are, it is essential to be available when your children have something they need to talk to you about. Set up a code word, something silly, like "banana," that they can mention to you when they have something troubling them. Let them know that the code word isn't to be used lightly—like when a sibling is bothering them. When they do call you aside for something serious, give them your full attention.

"Counseling" is not a shameful word.

School counselors offer wonderful services to children and their families facing tough times. Think of this—each year in school is brand new to your child, with entirely new issues to deal with, but the counselors at the school have the gift of perspective. They've seen hundreds of kids go through the same "growing up" processes, which means that they can help your child to see that everyone has challenges at one time or another, and there are lots of ways to fix them.

Eating and Drinking

Ditch the junk. We all need a minimum of five servings a day of fruits and vegetables, so stock up on fresh fruit and 100 percent fruit juice drinks. If your kids eat school cafeteria food, encourage them to take as many fruits and vegetables as they are allowed to have—and eat them *before* they start to eat their main dish. If you pack their

lunches, stop including cookies and high-fat snacks. Substitute pretzels or light popcorn and fresh or dried fruit.

Watch what you drink. Water is absolutely the best thirst quencher around—zero calories, always available, and free. Sodas sweetened with sugar or syrups provide hundreds of empty calories. And, as great as milk is for growing bodies (adults too), it's important to choose low-fat or fat-free milk instead of whole milk.

Physical Health

Move it. Go for family walks, runs, or bike rides several days a week. Have a family fitness "club," charting everyone's progress on everything from shooting hoops to jumping rope. If possible, join a local YMCA or community fitness center. Signing up for classes or sports clinics makes it even easier to remember to work out.

Keep your home smoke-free. If you or other adults in your household smoke, do your children a lifelong favor—never smoke in the house or in a car with them. Second-hand smoke can lead to a number of serious health problems, from breathing difficulties to cancer. Quit if

you can. Cut back as much as you can. And do everything you can to keep your children from ever taking up the habit.

Don't overlook checkups. Fluoride treatments and early detection of cavities or gum problems can save your children toothaches and other dental problems. The same goes for doctor's appointments—an ounce of prevention really is a pound of cure. A national program is in place to help families who can't afford medical insurance for their children. See your school nurse or state health agency for details.

There's so much to worry about when you have children at home. But remember this: Keeping them healthy—both mentally and physically—is your most important job.

