

MODEL Health!

Promoting Nutrition and Physical Activity in Children





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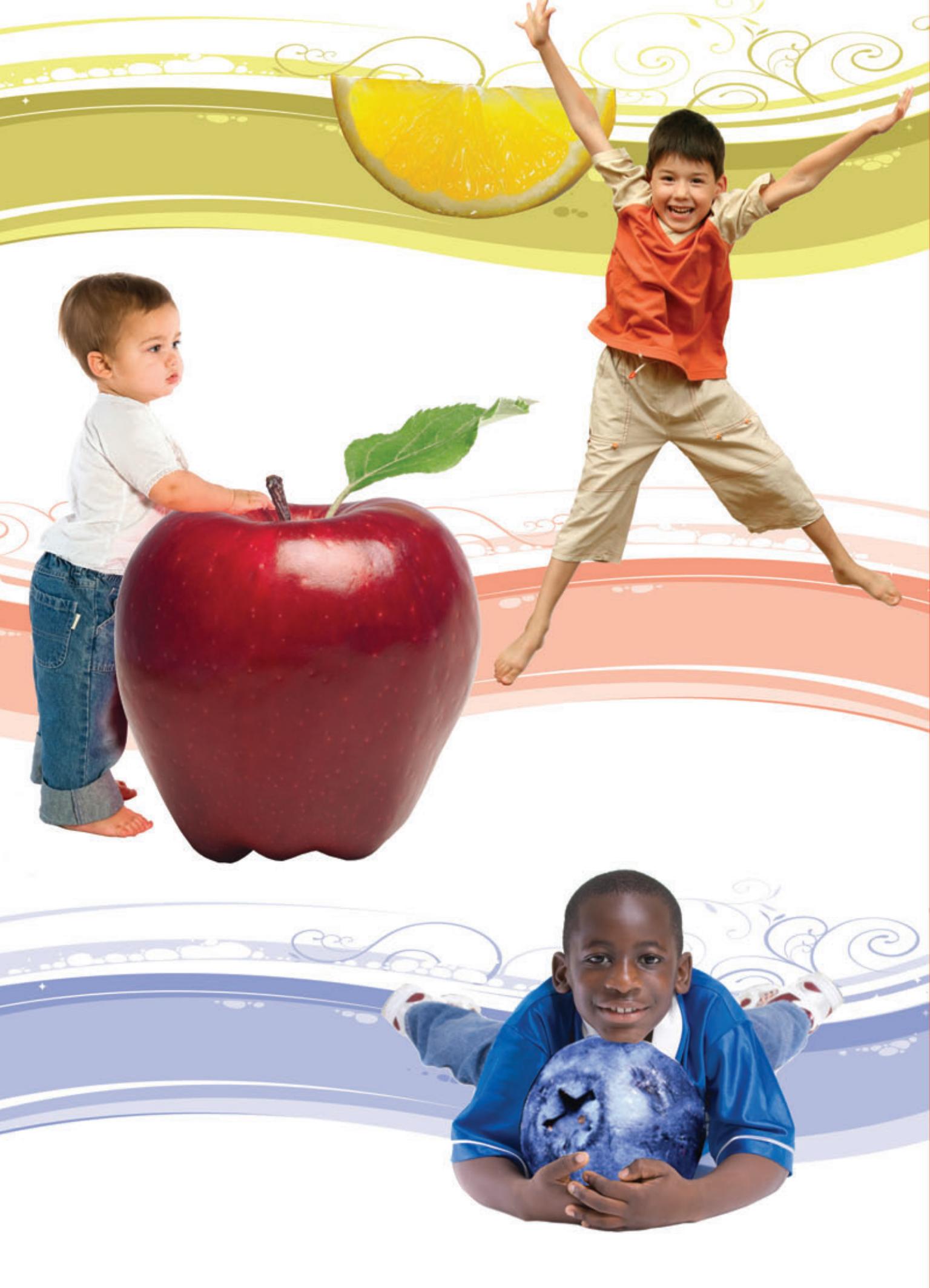


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INTRODUCTION

Implementing the Activities

MODEL Health! Promoting Nutrition and Physical Activity in Children learning kit (the Kit) is a collection of supplementary lessons on nutrition and physical activity with an emphasis on role modeling. Intended as a teacher resource in the early childhood classroom, the Kit is most appropriate for use with children ages three to five. Please note that the Kit is not a curriculum in itself but should be used to supplement your current curriculum. The Kit is designed in a way that enables the child care provider to teach an entire lesson over the span of a few days or quickly choose one or two activities from a lesson to enhance the daily plan. The lessons are designed to be flexible and can be tailored to the needs of the children in your care. If the children enjoy a particular lesson, take the opportunity to expand that lesson by using some of the enhancement activities or by using your own imagination and creativity.

Each activity can be introduced in a different way. You may want to start some activities with a book while you may start others with a song. You are the best judge of what the children in your care need. Read through the activities and decide which ones you want to include in your lesson plans. Before you begin each lesson, be sure to take a few minutes to prepare. Planning ahead will result in a smoother implementation of the lessons.

We urge the child care provider to take seriously the important role that he/she plays in the formation of nutrition and physical activity habits in young children. There are countless opportunities every day to positively impact the children's lives; small changes in the child care provider's attitudes and actions can help to establish healthy eating habits, a positive body image, and beneficial physical activity routines that will last a lifetime.

When introducing new foods to children, there are many things to take into consideration. Some suggestions to think about before implementing a nutrition curriculum include:

- Offering a new food before offering foods more familiar to the child. Often children are more willing to try new foods when they are hungry.
- Whenever possible, have children choose new foods themselves. Trying new foods is more fun for children when they make choices themselves.
- Talk about new foods and do taste tests. Have children describe the color, shape, feel, smell, sound and taste.
- Try the new foods with the children. Children learn from adults who model positive behaviors.
- Keep trying. A new food may need to be introduced seven to ten times before a child is willing to try it.
- Remember - a child doesn't need to like every food. Every child has different food favorites.

As you look through the activities, please keep in mind what children can successfully do at various ages. Generally...

Two and three year olds can:

- Wipe the table
- Wash or scrub fruits and vegetables
- Peel bananas (if the top is cut)
- Clear their place setting
- Put things in the trash

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Three and four year olds can:

- Pour and measure
- Mix ingredients
- Knead and shape dough
- Pat refrigerator biscuits into a crust
- Spread jelly on bread
- Beat with a whisk or fork

Five year olds can:

- Use a blender with close supervision
- Use a potato peeler
- Cut soft foods with a table knife
- Make a sandwich
- Set and clear the table
- Wash the table surface

Helpful Hints

- Read and think ahead about the activity so you will have time to gather the necessary equipment and supplies. Think about what you want the children to learn.
- Be sure to wash hands (yours and the children's) and food before beginning any activity involving food.
- Sanitize tables and work areas that will be used for food preparation.
- Safety is a priority. Monitor the children closely when they are working with knives (plastic or otherwise) or small objects.
- Be aware of any food allergies. If you are unsure of an allergy, please check with the parent before beginning an activity. The most common allergies are wheat, eggs, milk and milk products, tree nuts and peanuts. Be sure that you are aware of whether or not the child can even come in contact with the food. Many children with nut allergies cannot even be in the same room with nuts.
- Make sure to sit and eat with the children. Also be sure to taste test with the children and share your positive opinions. Children need you to role model for the experience to be meaningful.
- Be sure to include parents. Let them know what you are doing and include ways for them to carry that over into the home. At the end of each section there are activities suggested for parents to do with the children at home.

Getting Ready for Mealtime

- **Children need to know what to expect at mealtimes.** Children come to child care from a variety of homes and backgrounds. We need to have this knowledge so that we can help children understand what to expect from mealtimes.
- **Children learn eating skills between 3-6 years of age.** Children in child care settings benefit from practice using serving spoons, scoops, tongs, and pouring skills during play before they need these skills at the table.

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- **Children benefit from a transition from active play to mealtimes.** Children often need to transition from active play to mealtime. Quiet, calming activities such as circle time, story time, listening to music, and singing are all good transition activities to get the children ready to focus on eating.
- **Adults can anticipate where children should sit during mealtimes.** Some providers allow the children to choose their own seats for mealtime, while others choose seats for the children. As you get to know the children, you will discover what needs each child has. Some will need you to be close at hand, while others will do fine with you farther away. When more than one adult is eating with a large group of children, it makes sense for the adults to position themselves at different ends of the table so conversation and supervision is easier.
- **Controlling distractions during meal and snack times helps children eat well.** Keep the children engaged in conversation and focused on the meal. Try to minimize noise and distractions.
- **Prepare the children for the end of the meal.** Some children eat quickly and some eat more slowly. Remind children as you approach the end of mealtime so that they are assured of eating enough to hold them over to the next meal. Some children may need a second reminder.

Ways to Serve Food

- Pre-plated food – the food is served to the children already on plates.
- Cafeteria style – children get food served to them in a cafeteria line.
- Family style – food is served in serving bowls and children pass the bowls and serve themselves.

Family style meals are considered best practice in child care because they offer the children the most control over their eating. Providers have already taken control behind the scenes by planning healthy menus. Using the family style approach, children feel more in control because they can take the foods they want, they can refuse a food they don't want, or can take a small amount to start. The children can change their minds during the meal and ask for a food if they want more.

Follow-up After the Activity

- Ask questions to find out what children learned to reinforce the lesson.
- Remember to refer back to the activity later to help reinforce the activity.
- Present different activities to reinforce the same concepts.
- Start follow up lessons by talking with the children about what they learned in the original lesson.
- Make up your own songs and rhymes to familiar tunes to help reinforce lessons.

INTRODUCTION

Special thanks to the consultants who developed the content for the Kit:

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Gerard Cohee has been the director of The Children's Learning Center at the Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC) for the past eight years. He also serves as an adjunct faculty member of the Teacher Education Department at CCBC. With many years of experience in both the private and public school systems, Mr. Cohee has his Master's degree in Education and particularly enjoys the early literacy/reading process. He is also an avid musician, photographer, reader, and writer.

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Micki Freeny is currently the Director of the Prince George's County Memorial Library Association and has been a librarian for 37 years. A strong interest in children's services led her to become a member of the Birth to 5 Task Force and co-editor of "First Steps to Literacy." Ms. Freeny serves as an adjunct faculty member of the University of Maryland, College of Information Studies. In her spare time, she enjoys teaching at the Ballet Academy in Beltsville, Maryland.

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