

# Ideas: Wellness Program For Schools & Educational Institutions

The incidence of obesity in urban private school children in India is three times that of Public school children (29% versus 11%). Almost 30% of school children in India go to the private school system with a budget of over \$40 billion. It makes sense that School Wellness programs get initiated at the Private school system, which caters to more affluent children, who are at a higher risk of obesity. Childhood obesity increases the risk of diseases such as Metabolic syndrome (Prediabetes), Type2 diabetes, and Heart disease at a younger age.

The school-based wellness programs focused on healthy foods, healthy eating behaviors, and physical activity can make a powerful contribution towards a healthy future for the families, the societies and the nation as a whole. The food and lifestyle habits learned early in life in a group setting at the school, carries enormous potential for building healthy societies. However, it does require a significant commitment from all players- School teachers, administrators, school leaders, parents, local community, and political leaders. The burgeoning national epidemics of overweight, obesity, Type2 diabetes, and Heart disease demand that the schools, parents, and societies initiate and promote wellness programs at the schools.

United States Department of Disease Control (CDC) formulated the Best Practice Guidelines to promote healthy eating and physical activity at schools to tackle the problem of childhood obesity. These guidelines give a good insight on how to set up a practical wellness program at the school level. Health-promoting local cultural traditions must be included to make the wellness program more efficient to implement.

## ***Guideline # 1 - First establishes a school employee wellness program, which is all-inclusive***

All the players have to participate in the wellness program-Student leaders, Teachers, Administrators, Supervisors, and Principal. The core principles of the Wellness program are standard:

1. Healthy foods
2. Balanced lifestyle concerning eating, sleep, and activity behaviors.
3. Physical Activity/ Exercise
4. Periodic Screening for school staff and children at risk.

( Note: Review the section on Holistic meal and Balanced lifestyle on the website)

## ***Guideline # 2 - Establish a school Health council***

The council should comprise a core group of committed individuals:

- School student leaders- Student Monitors Prefects
- Teachers.
- Include the school leaders at each level of the hierarchy.
- Qualified healthcare personnel from the local community—Pediatrician/ family physician, Nurse, Nutritionists, and Public Health Professionals in the advisory role.

This core team sets the goals and standards for the all-inclusive program, which covers:

- Education on healthy foods and lifestyle modification.
- Setting up physical activity and exercise parameters.
- Organize educational materials for distribution and display.
- Plan periodic meeting to follow up on the success of the program.
- Identify the participants who may need screening and follow up.

Student health council leaders serve as role models for student peers. The health council members seek assistance from qualified healthcare personnel periodically as and when required.

***Guideline # 3 - Establish a school environment that supports healthy eating and physical activity behaviors*** – This can be achieved by :

- Visual aids such as educational posters in the appropriate locations to motivate the children and the staff.
- Encourage the concept of active transport- Walking, taking stairs, and bicycle riding whenever feasible (make a bicycle path around the school compound wall and include this as one of the required physical activity).
- Ensure healthy lunches, whether provided at premises or brought from home. Educate the parents on what to eat and what not to eat via parent-teacher conferences, health seminars, and health fairs.
- Organize food fairs, healthy recipe competitions, and sports meet in coordination with parents and teachers.
- Create a culture that holistic food, balanced lifestyle, and physical activity build beautiful bodies and bright brains. Use visual aids and posters to focus specifically on how packaged foods, fast foods, junk foods, and sugary sodas ruin the physical appearance, lead to overweight, obesity, disease, and disability at an early age.

***Guideline # 4 - Establish a firm Physical activity and physical education plan***

- All children must participate in daily 60 minutes or more of physical activity or active sport- running, badminton, volleyball, cricket, soccer, kabbadi, etc. Help our Primeminister Mr. Modi realize his vision of accomplishments in sports.
- Provide training and education on the traditional Indian practice of Yoga and Pranayam. Qualified Yoga teachers are readily available. A short instruction manual on the techniques is helpful.
- Promote and encourage the participation of the children in group sports- Badminton, Tennis, Kabbadi, Soccer, and football whatever is practical for the individual location.
- Promote interclass and interschool competition of group sports, Yoga exercises, celebrate camaraderie and athleticism.

**Guideline # 5 - Include health education in the school education curriculum** - The aim is to promote student's knowledge, attitudes, skills, and experiences needed for healthy foods, balanced lifestyle behaviors concerning eating, sleeping routines, and physical activity.

( Note: Review the section Holistic Meal and Balanced lifestyle on the website)

Education on Holistic meal and balanced lifestyles is a critical need of the hour. Educated children have the power to transform the eating and activity behaviors of their family, societies, communities, and finally, the nation as a whole.

- Initiate health education from kindergarten through grade 12 using age-appropriate education materials which are simple to understand and visualize.
- Use classroom instruction methodology and strategies that are interactive and engage all students and are relevant to daily life experiences.

**Guideline # 6 - Partner with families and community members in the development and implementation of healthy eating and physical activity policies, practices, and school programs.**

The partnerships build consensus, engagement, and awareness to empower the players participating in the wellness program.

- Encourage communication between school authorities, family members, and community members, so there is a seamless implementation of healthy eating and physical activity behaviors and attitudes for the students across the school, families, and communities.
- Develop strategies to motivate families to stay engaged and become role models.
- Cultivate the culture of healthy foods, eating behaviors, and physical activity in and out of school. Discourage Screen time on school days, including cell phone use except for study needs. Prohibit the use of cellphones during school hours. Restrict recreation screen time on holidays with limitation to 1-2 hours/day. Encourage physical and outdoor activity instead.
- Work with community leaders and local politicians to improve community resources for active transport (walking, bicycle riding, taking stairs) and physical spaces for walking, running, and sports activity. Active transportation to work and the school has shown to minimize obesity.

**Guideline # 6- Recruit qualified personnel for the professional development of the school staff**

Professional development includes providing qualified trainers for Health education, physical education, nutrition, and, stress management. Include the senior school student volunteers as wellness coaches in the school health council so they can serve as role models for their student peers.

**Guideline # 7- Organize Screening for school staff and children at risk**

Finally, for the staff and children at risk( overweight and obese) encourage advice and help organize a screening and early intervention programs. Prevention and early intervention come at a fraction of the cost of sick care of a medical condition. The primary screening program requires:

1. Weight and Waistline Measurements
2. Blood pressure and Heart rate check
3. Finger prick blood sugar and cholesterol check.

*References:*

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