



**Establishing Healthy Habits
during the Years of Middle
Childhood Development
(6-12 years of age)**

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Developmental Perspectives for the 6-12 year old

- Ages and Stages
 - Stages are predictable however children proceed through developmental stages at their own rate
- Importance of Family Systems
 - Multiple interaction effects
 - Family is the center for security and basis for self-esteem
 - Building values and attitudes
- Expanding interactions with other systems
 - Schools, peers, churches, activity groups, programs

6-12 years -Important time to build healthy habits!

- **Physical/Cognitive/Socio-emotional**
- **Physically**
 - Normative Growth rates – average of 2-3 inches per year and gain of 5-7 pounds per year
 - Coordinating and refining both large and small physical skills – need lots of practice running, climbing, skipping, balancing, writing, crafting, playing an instrument

6-12 years - Important time to build healthy habits!

- Cognitively

- Learn best when they actively seek solutions and are engaged in exploration and discovery
 - Collaborative rather than competitive
 - Play is highly important
- Language is advancing at a rapid rate
 - Construct knowledge through interactions with others
- Are able to think critically and also creatively
 - Like to make things and accomplish tasks
 - Sense of industry vs. inferiority
 - Love to make collections

6-12 years - Important time to build healthy habits!

- Socio-emotionally
 - Family is still the center of influence but external influences are increasing
 - Idealize role models
 - Developing emotional self-awareness
 - Peers transmit knowledge and provide companionship
 - Peer status becomes important
 - Increased awareness of social comparison
 - Increase in bullying

So how can we encourage and build healthy habits for 6-12 year olds?

- Encourage increased physical activity
 - Limit television, unplug from technology
 - Find group activities that encourage physical skills but are not too structured or competitive
- Provide healthy role modeling
 - Choose healthy foods and teach children how to read food labels – explaining why you are making good choices
 - Bike, swim, fish, play with your children – let them see you being active
 - Let children see you advocate to teachers, coaches, group leaders for healthy snacks

So how can we encourage and build healthy habits for 6-12 year olds?

- Engage children in projects
 - Facilitate planning and growing a garden
 - Encourage child to plan a healthy meal and do the shopping and preparation
 - Challenge children to make sack lunches healthier or to lobby their school for healthy choices
 - Encourage children to make a collection of healthy habits and non-healthy habits cut out from magazines

So how can we encourage and build healthy habits for 6-12 year olds?

- Involve peers in activities
 - Explore parks and play areas with a group of friends – enjoy nature and the outdoors!
 - At a party have friends make their own healthy pizzas.
 - Facilitate the formation of a “Healthy Club” with a clever name, designed t-shirts and emblems, etc.
 - Encourage creative, healthy cooking and physical activities.
 - Plan a healthy scavenger hunt at the local grocery store.
 - Visit a local organic garden or farm. Interview the owners.

Remember the family is the key for building healthy attitudes and values

- Talk with children about valuing healthy habits and model them
- Have family discussion “go-rounds” where everyone shares a healthy choice they made during the day
- Collect a list of healthy choices/options available at fast food vendors
- Spend time practicing physical skills with your children
- Involve children in planning and developing healthy activities for the family such as a pedometer challenge for family members.



**By working together we can all
strive to establish lifelong
healthy habits for our children!**

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