ELEV8 Physical Activity

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INTRODUCTION

INCREASE YOUR KNOWEDGE OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

IN THIS SECTION, YOU WILL:

- Get a quick overview of the state of physical activity today
- Learn about the benefits of physical activity for youth
- Understand why after school is the ideal setting to improve physical activity for youth
- Learn about CANFIT's Active8 Toolkit

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY TODAY

The rising level of obesity among youth has become one of the hot topics in today's culture. But it's a bit more complex than one might think. Besides lifestyle choices, factors such as the environment, economics, genetics and culture all play a major role in the rising number of overweight youth and adults in the U.S.

Young people's levels of physical activity have dropped dramatically in recent decades. For example, the number of students who bike or walk to school has decreased by nearly 30% in the last 30 years (CDC, 2007). Young people are watching more television, playing video games and spending several hours a day on the computer. In addition to these passive pursuits, youth are also consuming more calories by eating larger portion sizes, drinking more soda or high-sugar drinks and eating out almost daily at fast- food restaurants. These habits have led to an increase in Type II diabetes among youth, along with other health related problems.

DID YOU KNOW?

Physical activity can help improve:

- Attention
- Academic performance
- Behavior
- Coordination
- Memory
- Risk for chronic disease
- Self-esteem

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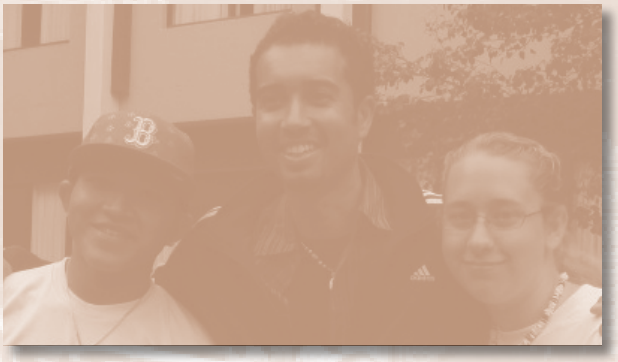
10 THINGS YOU MAY NOT KNOW ABOUT PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

1. **Physical activity and play are strongly connected to our health and learning.**
2. **Where you live affects whether or not you have access to safe opportunities to be active and play.**
3. **Physical education in school helps students develop the knowledge, skills, and confidence to be physically active, both in school and throughout their lives.**
4. **The built environment, or the places/spaces made or modified by people, can encourage or discourage physical activity.**
5. **Everything, from having Physical Education in schools to whether or not we choose family hikes over family screen time affect our ability to be physically active.**
6. **Opportunties for physical activity have been designed out of the places we live, learn, work and play.**
7. **Many schools lack playgrounds or have eliminated Physical Education, erasing opportunities for kids to play and be healthy where they spend eight hours a day.**
8. **In many communities, parks, playgrounds and recreation centers are dilapidated and dangerous, and fear of crime limits physical activity even more.**
9. **Building and redesigning neighborhoods with sidewalks, safe streets and quality parks will invite everyday activity, improving community health and well-being.**
10. **Research has shown that residents are more physically active when there are sidewalks, bicycle lanes, mixed-use land development and stronger planning policies.**

Now more than ever, physical activity is being regarded as a practical way to help improve a child's health and reduce the risk of developing chronic disease. Plus, the benefits of physical activity go far beyond physical health. Research shows that healthier kids are better able to learn, and active kids are healthier kids. Research also shows that physical activity can improve youths' focus and concentration for academic achievement. In addition, youth who are more active tend to have higher self-esteem and lower levels of anxiety.



WHY AFTER SCHOOL PHYSICAL ACTIVITY?

There is much attention placed on improving physical activity during the day (recess and physical education.) Yet youth (especially low-income youth of color) spend a significant portion of their day in out-of-school or after school time and are most active during this period. Based on an evaluation of after school programs involved in the California Endowment's Healthy Eating Active Communities (HEAC) initiative, after school hours appear to be the time when many students are more physically active than during school Physical Education. There are standards, policies and recommendations for physical activity and physical education during the school day in California. Yet, we're not making progress toward meeting them, as schools continue to eliminate physical education, resources and infrastructure to provide academic programming.

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After school and other community-based programs are in a significant position to help youth become more active and get the daily physical activity they need. Many after school organizations, like the YMCA and Boys and Girls Club, already focus on physical activity in their after school programming. These program schedules are flexible and can be tailored to a youth's interest. After school also has the greatest chance to achieve the three characteristics of quality physical activity identified by the National Association for Sport and Physical Education:

- Activities are voluntary and participants have a choice of activities
- All students are given opportunities to participate, regardless of physical ability
- Students are engaged in planning, organizing and implementing physical activity programming

Moreover, being physically active in after school programs helps youth stay safe and engaged during the hours of 3-6 p.m., when high-risk behaviors (such as smoking, drinking or using drugs), crime, violence and accidents among adolescents are the highest.

BUT... as today's youth providers, it is not enough just to know the facts, benefits and importance of physical activity. Nor is it enough to know some games or activities to lead with youth. To get all youth to be active, we must challenge ourselves to see the bigger picture and take a more active role. For example, we must consider the physical environment of youth during school and out-of-school time to truly understand how we can support more physical activity opportunities. If gyms aren't affordable, are there nearby parks? Is where youth play truly safe? It is no secret that taking care of your own health will help you understand how important it is to promote physical activity to youth. Are you role modeling physical activity by participating with them? Are you encouraging youth to get active outside the school day by encouraging them to participate in sports or community physical activity events?

CANFIT's ACTIVE8 will guide youth providers through an easy 8-step process that will not only help improve the physical activity of youth but will also allow you to become a physical activity advocate along the way!

WHAT IS CANFIT'S ACTIVE8?

CANFIT's ACTIVE8 (activate) is an 8-step guide for providers that engages youth through creating opportunities for physical activity that are enjoyable, meets their needs and involves and encourages participation of all, including peers, staff, administrators, parents and community members.

CANFIT's ACTIVE8 is designed to help youth providers 1) incorporate "simple, yet appropriate" physical activities and 2) create a positive physical activity culture through improving policies in your after school, community and neighborhood. Throughout the guide are tips on how to effectively incorporate everyday physical activity, what types of exercises are appropriate and how to involve youth in improving their physical activity environment. It is our intention to make physical activity easy, fun and enjoyable for youth and provide a range of choices and activities that will continue to keep young people ACTIVE8'ed and moving!

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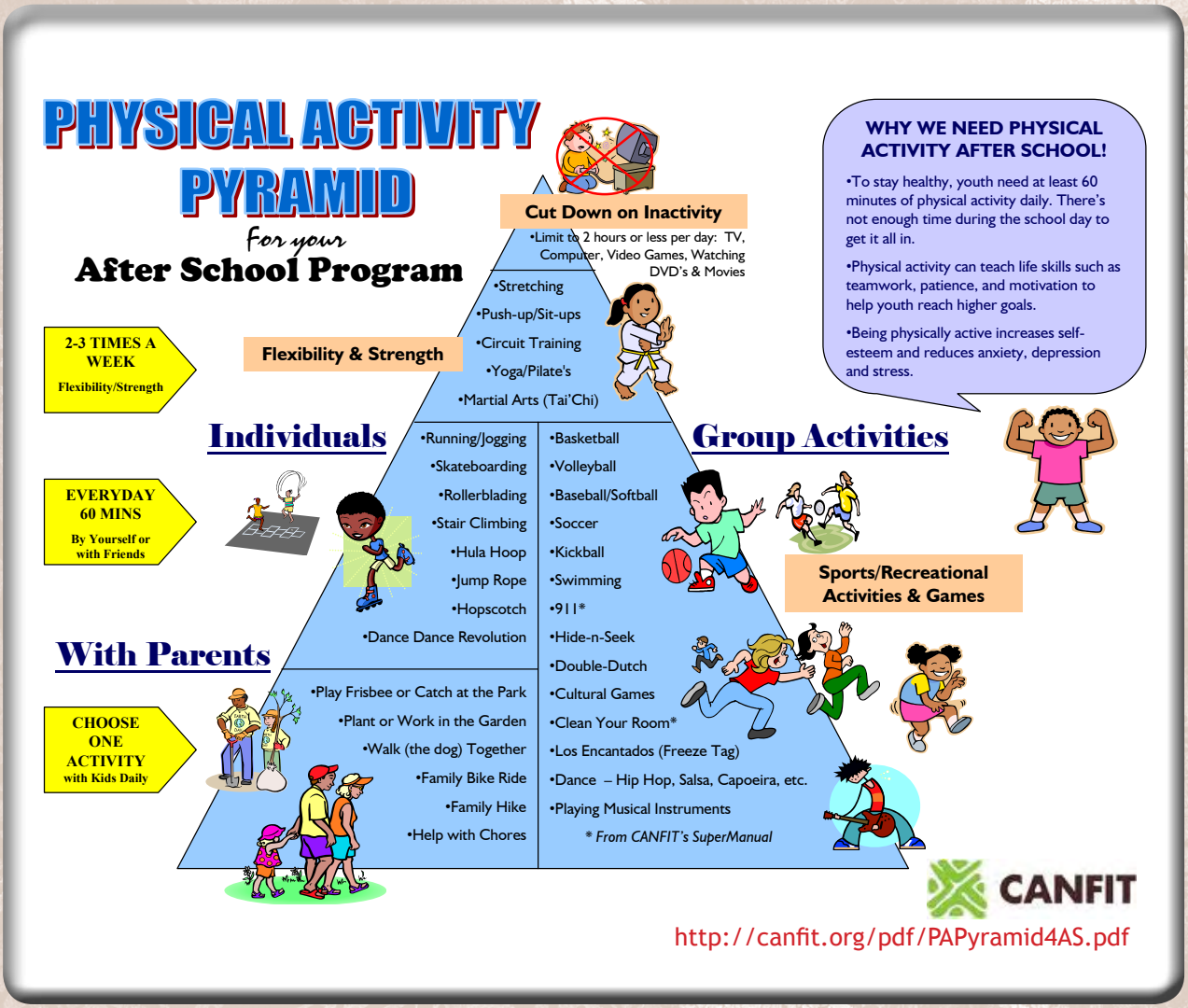
HOW IS ACTIVE8 DIFFERENT THAN OTHER PHYSICAL ACTIVITY GUIDES?

Although many other interventions and programs focus on physical education during the school day, ACTIVE8 is designed for youth providers as a way to enhance and support physical activity during out-of-school time.

At CANFIT, we recognize that there are lots of great physical activity curriculums, guides and resources (see Step 8), but none that incorporate both the programmatic and policy/advocacy support necessary to truly improve physical activity for youth in after school or community settings. For example, you can use our picture guide to teach activities on the field but what if the field, is not safe or playable? Try the What's in My Community activity, which could begin a discussion on what could be done.

We encourage you to use our tools as a guide, create your own to meet the needs of your youth and ACTIVE8 yourself and others to become physical activity advocates in your community!



http://canfit.org/pdf/PAPyramid4AS.pdf

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