

## ***Creating and Implementing a Physical Activity Policy for Child Care Centers***

### **Challenge**

One in five children under the age of 6 is overweight or obese. An overweight 3-year-old child is nearly eight times more likely to become an overweight young adult than a non-overweight developing 3-year-old. In 2012, nearly 11 million children under age 5 in the US were in some type of child care arrangement every week. On average, the children of working mothers spend 35 hours a week in child care. Since children spend so much time in child care, Sanford Health decided to develop a program to promote physical activity in child care settings. If children establish healthy habits at a young age, these healthy habits are more likely to follow them through life.

### **Solution**

Sanford Health's Physical Activity Technical Assistance (PATA) Program includes several parts. Since the directors of child care centers write and lead policy, PATA staff began working with them. Opportunities included informational webinars on building a physical activity policy, onsite one-on-one technical assistance to help write and implement the policy, and resources such as fitCare trainings to adopt and maintain the policy. The PATA Program then worked with staff to help them implement the policy, offering ideas on how to put more physical activity into their daily routine.

### **Summary**

The program staff reviewed several sources to determine what criteria and standards would be used to frame the work and decided on using the information from the Nutritional and Physical Activity Self-Assessment for Child Care (NAP SACC), Nemours and the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP). These were combined into a policy guidelines document and broken down into policy categories, criteria and standards. This document provides the framework of the program.

Program staff conducted a survey of the child care centers in the region and asked how many had a physical activity policy in their handbook. Very few had a written policy and if they did, it was short and vague. Since policy leads to action, the program started with physical activity policy.

The key components of the program were the willingness of the directors to make changes and the staff to follow their lead and implement the policy. The children benefited the most by participating in physical activity every day, which will in turn improve their physical and emotional health.

### **Background**

The program started off as a pilot project in 2013. The first step involved researching various sources for physical activity criteria. Implementation started in March 2014 and will be funded through May 2015.

A team was put together to do the research and develop the criteria and the flow of the program. Key staff were used to provide the direct service, working with directors on writing policies, meeting with the staff to help implement the policy and modeling ideas to get the children involved and moving. The team still meets monthly to plan for future growth, problem solve issues that arise and refine the process.



## Results

PATA based the program on behavior change, self-efficacy and transtheoretical theories along with researched-based coaching strategies. The physical activity policy criteria is evidence-based.

There have been positive responses to the program. Physical activity policies were written into staff and parent handbooks. Physical activity is part of the daily schedule and has become part of the culture of the program. The centers from the first group are in different phases of implementation due to various challenges.

Two of the centers are now in the maintenance part of the program. They have a physical activity policy in place and have made physical activity a part of their daily routine. Physical activity is more intentional, it is done through planned activities, short bursts of movement and spontaneous play. Currently, a second group of child care center directors are in the process of writing physical activity policies.



## Lessons Learned

The goal of 10 child care programs participating in the project was met by having two groups of participants. The team was able to implement lessons learned from the first pilot group with the second group.

One of the lessons staff have learned is how much coaching and technical assistance it can take for a director to get started. The intent is there, it can just be hard to make time when dealing with staffing and the daily operations of a center. Program staff have been flexible with scheduling meetings in order to accommodate the directors' schedules.

### Resources

Sanford Children's CHILD Services  
[www.goodandhealthysd.org](http://www.goodandhealthysd.org)

### Local Contact

**Misty Barber**  
Family Life Educator  
Sanford Children's CHILD Services  
605.333.0663

### Get Involved!

It is exciting to see the children involved in physical activity. Staff have embraced the policies and are engaged in physical play with the children; they are always wanting to learn and implement new ideas. Physical activity is an expectation of current staff and included in the orientation of new staff. The centers are proud of their accomplishments and have shared them with families through family nights and center blog posts.