Healthy Children, Healthy Families: Parents Making a Difference!

The Healthy Children, Healthy Families: Parents Making a Difference! (HCHF) curriculum was developed to support parents and caregivers by providing education on nutrition, physical activity, and parenting practices that help families make healthy changes. HCHF focuses on the behaviors most likely to help children avoid unhealthy weight gain. The evidence-based Paths to Success include: eating more vegetables and fruits, playing actively, eating fewer energy-dense foods, limiting TV and computer time, drinking water or low-fat milk instead of sweetened drinks, and having sensible servings.

Participants also learn to use parenting strategies to increase their positive influence on children’s choices. These are the Keys to Success:

- **Showing** (teaching by example),
- **Supporting** (helping children feel good about themselves),
- **Guiding** (offering choices within limits), and
- **Shaping** (changing environments to make healthy choices easier).

A team of researchers and practitioners developed and tested HCHF in eight Cornell Cooperative Extension sites in New York State. The curriculum was revised to reflect feedback from educators and parents. A three year process evaluation explored not only what works, but how and why, and identified “best practices” for program delivery.

Through partner agencies, HCHF reaches low-income parents and caregivers of children aged 3-11 years. Small groups attend a series of 8 hands-on workshops where they meet other parents, prepare recipes, taste new foods, and try fun activities to do at home with children. Each week, participants identify a new healthy step to try with their families and then discuss their challenges and successes. Over time, these steps become healthy habits for parents and children.

Participants report significantly improved food, activity and parenting behaviors at the end of the workshop series. The greatest improvements are in soda intake; frequency of consuming low-fat dairy, vegetables and fruit; letting children decide how much to eat; child physical activity; and the availability of fruit vs. non-nutritious snack foods at home.

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