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Small Changes Make a Big Difference

Too often when we consider changing habits to improve health or weight management, we often think that drastic action will be needed. Not so says most major nationwide health organizations. The concept that small changes can make a big difference is an important, and reassuring, one for most of us. When we think of losing weight or improving our health, we imagine going on a strict diet, or needing to spend hours in a gym. We think we must drop 30, 40, or 50 pounds to make a significant improvement in our health.

The grim view of diet, exercise and weight loss can be a serious obstacle to health in a couple of ways. One is that people give up before they even start. If the road to a healthy body is too long and painful, why bother? Might as well sit on the couch and eat and drink what you like!

The other issue is that this view makes people desperate for quick fixes. That's when the supplement industry steps in with just what desperate people want: miracle products promising that you can "dump ugly fat without strenuous exercise"; "lose body fat while you sleep"; "lose weight without changing what you eat, no exercise needed" (actual quotes from current radio ads). Many popular weight loss diets and supplements put your health at risk along with their empty promises.

According to the project manager for the Montana Obesity Prevention Program, recent studies have confirmed that small changes in eating habits and activity levels can mean big health benefits. We are also learning that physical activity may even be able to turn back the clock – at least when it comes to heart health. Results from a large Diabetes Prevention Program clinical trial, published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, showed that lifestyle modifications (low-fat eating and walking 30 minutes a day) could reduce the risk of developing diabetes by a whopping 58 percent. These results are consistent with other research that indicates losing as little as ten pounds can lower blood pressure and improve blood cholesterol.

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The key is to focus small changes in eating and activity that you are willing to do for the rest of your life. It can be as easy as eating a piece of fruit most days in place of that mid-afternoon candy bar; being aware of serving sizes, and making your portions smaller; eating more vegetables with your meals; parking your car farther from your destination, whether at work or shopping, and walking; or before you start dinner, walk away from your house in any direction for 10 minutes, then walk back. Small changes to improve health can be tasty and fun.

(adapted from Eat Right Montana – Healthy Families March, 2002)

Symptoms of Trauma Differ by Age

Since the terrorist attacks on September 11, we, as parents have dealt with explaining and listening to our children. Now, with the United States at war, we continue to deal with fears, anxieties and the realities of loved ones leaving home to defend our country.

The story on page four of *The Balancing Act* gives you basic parenting tips to help you talk with your children. Here, I wanted to help you consider how children may react to the war and trauma, based on their age.

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Potential child/adolescent reactions to trauma. Most children will be able to cope with their concerns over current events with the help of parents and other caring adults. However, some children may be at risk of more extreme reactions because of personal circumstances. Symptoms may differ depending on age. You should contact a professional if your children exhibit significant changes in behavior or any of the following symptoms over an extended period of time.

- **Preschoolers**—thumb sucking, bedwetting, clinging to parents, sleep disturbances, loss of appetite, fear of the dark, regression in behavior, withdrawal from friends and routines.
- **Elementary School Children**—irritability, aggressiveness, clinginess, nightmares, school avoidance, poor concentration, withdrawal from activities and friends.
- **Adolescents**—sleeping and eating disturbances, agitation, increase in conflicts, physical complaints, delinquent behavior and poor concentration.

Resources

There are many organizations and agencies with helpful information about helping children and families cope with the stress of war, terrorism and other crises. Check these out!

- American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
<http://aacap.org>
- American Red Cross <http://www.redcross.org>
- American School Counselors Association,
www.schoolcounselor.org
- American Psychological Association www.apa.org
- Federal Emergency Management Agency <http://www.fema.org/>
- National Association of School Psychologists
www.nasponline.org
- Army Deployment Handbook
<http://www.wood.army.mil/mwr/deploymenthandook.htm>

Adapted from the National Association of School Psychologists

Keeping Kids' Behavior Under Control

Boundaries and expectations are two of the fundamental assets that the Search Institute has identified as important factors in shaping young people lives and helping them to be successful. These assets are about knowing what's in bounds and out of bound when it comes to young people's behavior. They're about rules and consequences – and about adults who care enough to follow through. They're also about people who challenge and inspire young people to do their best and to believe in themselves.

Ways to Correct Kids Behavior Without Being Bossy or Rude

1. **Talk in a natural tone.** No one likes to be yelled at. Better yet, talk softer than usual.
2. **Use I-statements, not You-statements.** *Example:* Instead of “You shouldn’t call each other names,” try “I feel sad when you call each other names because you seem like such good friends.”
3. **Suggest alternatives.** *Example:* “If you climb that big tree, you might fall and get hurt. Why don’t we go to the park and you can climb on the monkey bars instead?”
4. **Keep it short and simple (K.I.S.S.)** *Example:* Instead of “Sammy, I saw you drop your soda can on the sidewalk. Now pick it up and put it in the trashcan. You know better than to be a litterbug!” try “Sammy...trash can.”
5. **Find something to praise.** *Example* “Juan you are a great skateboarder. But when the Kelly kids are playing on the sidewalk, could you pick up your board and carry it past them?”
6. **Offer choices.** *Example:* “Keisha, instead of teasing Marcy and her friend, you can either go home or help me wash the car. Which would you rather do?”
7. **Build cooperation.** *Example:* “Luther, if you agree to stop teasing Mr. Mikulski’s dog, we can watch a video together.”
8. **Don’t judge. Describe.** *Example:* Instead of “Tony, I saw you knock over Ms. Liebow’s recycling container. That was a mean thing to do. Now her cans and newspapers are all over the alley,” try “Tony, Ms. Liebow’s recycling ended up in the alley.”
9. **Give information and let kids choose to correct their own behavior.** *Example:* “When you walk across Mr. Chan’s yard instead of using the sidewalk, you trample his flowers.”
10. **Instead of having a face-to-face conversation about a negative behavior, try a “parallel conversation.”** Do something fun together (shoot some baskets, bake cookies, play a game) and take advantage of that time to talk.
11. **Notice positive behavior.** “Zoe, you helped Mrs. Romano pick up her groceries when she dropped them. Good going!”
12. **Bite your tongue before using any of these phrases (or others that make kids feel small, stupid, defensive or patronized):**

“You always...”	“You should know better than to...”
“You never...”	“Why did you do that?”
“You shouldn’t...”	“What were you thinking...”
“You’d better...”	“What’s wrong with you?”
“I’ve told you before...”	“That was a dumb thing to do...”

Adapted from What Teens Need to Succeed: Proven, Practical Ways to Shape Your Own Future by Peter Benson, Judy Galbraith and Pamela Espeland.

Time to Talk War with Your Children

“Mommy, why don’t they use their words not their hands?” asks five-year-old Shannon.

“My friend’s Dad is gone to war. He gets to carry a gun,” explained eight-year-old Scott. “I wouldn’t want you to go to war even if you got to carry a gun,” he continues as he talks with his Dad.

War is hard for all of us, especially our children. They have questions and concerns, just as we do. They don’t see war as we see it. Here are some tips to help you as you deal with your children during the war with Iraq.

- Take time to think about, and cope with your own feelings.
- Help your children cope with their feelings by simultaneously acknowledging their feelings and reassuring them.
- Don’t try to talk children out of what they are feeling.
- Share your feelings with your children (depending on their ages), but be careful not to look to your children for support.
- Let your kids know it’s okay to ask questions. Answer their questions directly, but do not give them more information than they need...or more than you think they can handle.
- Try to give balance to the attention you give to the war and unfolding events with maintaining “normal” activities and routines at home.
- Make sure you and your children eat well and get enough exercise and sleep.