

# Making Delaware Early Child Care Environments Healthier



## Healthy Habits Start Early

NHPS has recognized the importance of starting early in life to promote healthy lifestyles. In Delaware, 29% of children between the ages of two and five are already overweight or obese. With 53,000 children enrolled in licensed child care programs, these programs offer unique opportunities to provide both a healthy environment throughout the day while children are in the program, as well as a way to offer educational materials and support to families to encourage healthier behaviors, when children are at home. In order to combat the growing childhood obesity epidemic, NHPS has taken a multi-level approach to implementing policies and practice changes that will support young children in licensed child care settings to eat healthier meals and participate in moderate to vigorous physical activity. Key policy and practice changes follow.

### 1. Regulatory changes through the Office of Child Care Licensing (OCCL) that affect all licensed child care (center-based, family and after-school) to improve healthy eating and physical activity practices for children in child care.

These changes include healthier nutritional standards, mandated time for moderate to vigorous physical activity, and reduced screen time. Until 2007, child care regulations in Delaware were among the oldest in the nation, when major revisions were made to center based, afterschool and family-based care. NHPS worked with OCCL to include regulations that would reduce sedentary behavior and promote healthy eating and physical activity. By the end of 2008, these regulations will apply to both center-based programs and family child care providers.

Key changes in the regulations reflect the *5-2-1-Almost None\** healthy lifestyle formula. For example:

- For every three hours a child is in a program, 20 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity will be planned and implemented.
- While awake, infants are limited to 30 minutes of time spent in swings, strollers and other confining equipment.
- Use of TV, videos, video games, etc. is prohibited for children under age two and limited to no more than one hour for older children. Parent permission is required for use of any media.

\*Learn more about *5-2-1-Almost None* on the left inside panel.

### 2. Nutrition regulation changes to the Delaware Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) to improve food and beverage offerings by all licensed child care providers.

NHPS and the Delaware CACFP collaborated in a year long process to adopt new best practice standards and policies for the state of Delaware. In the first step towards policy change, NHPS and CACFP co-authored *Best Practices for Healthy Eating: A Guide to Help Children Grow Up Healthy*, which was disseminated through NHPS training with all of the CACFP sponsors in August 2007, and again in March 2008. After obtaining feedback, child care programs found that many of the “best practices” were not difficult to implement and generally were cost neutral. Using this information, with support from

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## Our Formula for a Healthy Lifestyle: 5-2-1-Almost None

NHPS is taking a leading role to help people understand the causes and health implications of obesity and the best ways to promote healthier lifestyles among children and families.

5-2-1-Almost None is our formula for a healthy lifestyle.

- Eat five or more servings of fruits and vegetables per day.



- Spend no more than two hours per day in front of a screen (TV, video games, recreational computer time).
- Get at least one hour of physical activity per day.
- Drink almost no sugary beverages like soda and sports drinks.

For more information about our work to make Delaware's Children the Healthiest in the Nation, visit:  
[www.growuphealthy.org](http://www.growuphealthy.org)

NHPS, the Delaware CACFP director created new policy regulations based on the *Best Practices Guidelines*. As of July 1, 2008, the CACFP has implemented these new policies with a six-month grace period before enforcement. The new policies (listed on page four) include the following:

- Only 100% fruit juice may be served, and only one serving per day is allowed. No juice is allowed for infants under one year of age.
- Only fat-free or 1% milk may be served to children over two years of age.
- All pre-fried and fried food items must have less than 35% of their calories come from total fat.
- Calories from sweet baked goods (e.g., cookies, cakes, donuts, Danish, etc.) may only be served once every two weeks as a snack.

In Delaware, OCCL regulations governing nutrition abide by the CACFP regulations; therefore, all child care programs must follow the CACFP standards.

### 3. Passage of legislation implementing Delaware Stars for Early Success, a quality rating and improvement system to increase the quality of services provided by early care and education programs throughout the state.

NHPS has been part of an effort to improve the quality of child care in our state through Delaware Stars for Early Success. Active in developing the Delaware Stars program plan, we advocated for language in the enabling legislation: "the rating and improvement system shall...support children in being physically and emotionally healthy and eager to learn."

The legislation acknowledged that Delaware Stars for Early Success has been successfully piloted in Delaware, and specifically mentioned NHPS as one of the organizations that has supported the public/private partnership. Currently the program is voluntary, but 60 additional programs are signing on during 2008 to join the original 15 pilot sites. NHPS will

- partner with other organizations to assist in the effort;
- serve on the Stars management team;
- invite all the Stars child care center-based programs to join the NHPS Child Care Collaborative beginning in 2009;
- continue to advocate for specific standards around physical and emotional health and well being; and advocate for funding and integration with the state's Purchase of Care system.

### 4. Changes to the training infrastructure of the state to help ensure that those trained are educated in best, age-specific practices relating to healthy eating and physical activity.

NHPS has worked to highlight the importance of healthy eating, physical activity and screen time reduction to reach all child care providers where they are trained and educated. Specifically:

- We are working with our state regulatory agencies to include healthy eating and

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physical activity in CACFP sponsored trainings, required OCCL orientations for new providers, and required basic certification programs.

- We are collaborating with our state community colleges to include healthy eating and physical activity in required classes for degree programs.

## 5. Development and implementation of a learning collaborative model to support long term sustainable policy and practice changes in the child care setting.

Beginning in 2005, NHPS staff worked with four large child care centers that served as pilot sites for our healthy eating and physical activity model of change. While somewhat reluctant to engage in children's health promotion initially, these centers have now become champions for this work because of the enormous impact the easily-implemented changes have had on the children, staff, and the children's families. From the knowledge gained from these pilot sites, a learning collaborative model was developed and implemented to incorporate a blended technical assistance system to support increasing knowledge and planning for healthy change. Leaders from these four pilot sites now serve as faculty and mentor 28 new programs serving over 3,000 children and families across Delaware. Their experiences and collaboration with us have helped us learn how to better engage with centers as we support them through the process of making long term, sustainable healthy changes.

NHPS' five-session, 12 month collaboration model provides knowledge and a wider network within the child care community; in addition, the model empowers leadership teams by offering a blueprint for change, support for engaging staff, and effective tools for training within each center. Specifically, the learning collaborative model includes

- hands on learning sessions for each core site leadership team;
- individualized action plans developed by each team outlining the steps that they will take to emphasize healthy lifestyles for their staff, their children, and the children's families;
- monthly teleconference calls with national speakers on topics that learning collaborative participants identify as challenges to change;
- materials and resources for staff training and practice change (described in section 6); and
- technical assistance consults from NHPS staff members.

## 6. Development of tools for teachers to use to educate and engage infants, toddlers and preschoolers in healthy eating habits, reduced screen time and physical activity in the classroom.

NHPS recognizes that programs need tools that they can readily use to make changes in their child care environments. In some cases we provided sample policies to incorporate into parent handbooks; some centers, for example, requested material about appropriate items for parents to send for snacks, birthdays, and holiday celebrations. Classroom teachers sought activities to engage the children in learning about healthy foods, and to involve them in moderate to vigorous physical activities. With the needs and challenges of the classroom teacher in mind we collaborated with other organizations to develop useful tools. For example, we worked with the Sesame Workshop, the creators of Sesame Street,

**Through all of these changes in regulation, policy, and classroom practices, Delaware child care programs are striving to make a difference in children's health by promoting a healthy lifestyle right from the start.**

**We believe that healthy habits learned in the child care setting, and reinforced through family support, can lay a foundation for "Healthy Habits for Life."**

For more information about NHPS and our work to make Delaware's Children the Healthiest in the Nation, visit: [www.growuphealthy.org](http://www.growuphealthy.org)

to produce a toolkit of activities entitled *Healthy Habits for Life* for the 3-5 year old classroom, and with the University of Delaware faculty, to develop activities for infant and toddler classes.

NHPS also produced videos in DVD format that highlight best practices in supporting healthy eating and engaging children in physical activities, as well key concepts from *I am Moving, I am Learning*, a national Head Start initiative. These videos motivate providers about the urgent concern about children's obesity, and they provide concrete examples of the power of role modeling by child care staff when they engage children in family style meals or lead vigorous but fun physical activities.

## 2008 Delaware Child and Adult Care Food Program Standards

### Infants

#### Juice

- No juice for infants under 12 months of age.

#### Meat/Meat Alternates

- Only real cheese may be served; no cheese product or cheese food (Policy FFY'05).

#### Grains

- All grain products must contain  $\leq 6$  grams of sugar. Whole grains are highly encouraged.

### Children

#### Juice

- No more than one serving per day of 100% juice may be served to children (1 to 18 years).
- Non-100% juice (juice drink or cocktail) is not allowed.

#### Milk

- Children one to two years of age: whole milk
- Children over two: 1% or fat-free milk

#### Fruits/Vegetables

- No baked pre-fried or fried fruits and vegetables (e.g., French fries and tater tots) will be allowed unless the 35% total fat rule applies (see Best Practices Guide for Healthy Eating). It is highly recommended not serving at all.

#### Meat/Meat Alternates

- Processed meats (e.g. hot dogs, sausage, baloney etc.) may only be served once per two-week cycle. It is highly recommended not serving at all.
- No baked pre-fried or fried food items shall be allowed (e.g., chicken nuggets, fish sticks) unless the 35% total fat rule applies (see Best Practices Guide for Healthy Eating). It is highly recommended not serving at all.
- Only real cheese may be served; no cheese product or cheese food (Policy FFY'05).

#### Grains

- A whole grain product must be served at least once per day where a whole grain is listed as the first ingredient (e.g., grains, pastas, cereal, breads, rice, etc.).
- All grain products (including cereals) must contain  $\leq 6$  grams of sugar.
- Sweet grains/baked goods (e.g., cookies, cakes, donuts, Danishes, etc.) may only be served once per two-week cycle as a snack. It is highly recommended not serving at all.

