

Healthy Children – a Health Promoting Method in Diet and Physical Activity for Preschools

Context

Childhood obesity is globally a growing problem due to poor diet and inadequate physical activity. Preschool is an important arena for health promotion among children in Sweden. Local authorities provide preschool for all children. As a consequence most 1-5 year-olds attend preschool, where they spend most of their (precious during Swedish winter) daylight hours and have their meals served.

Rationale

The professional behaviour of preschool staff can be compromised by unconscious values and attitudes. This is especially evident at mealtimes and during outdoor activities. There is a potential for improving the behaviour of the teachers at mealtime and outdoors, increasing the time spent outdoors and making improvements in the quality of the food served as well as in the layout of the school yard. Promoting health and preventing obesity in children means giving them a supportive environment. This includes giving them the habits of eating healthy and spending time outdoors to play every day.

Development of the Method

The method of Healthy Children was developed together with preschools in a suburban socioeconomically deprived area in Stockholm. Research on how children form their habits of eating and physical activity and a participatory approach consistent with organizational research was used.

Method Components

The method consists of nine meetings during one year where the entire staff studies printed materials together, evaluates the procedures at their preschool through self-assessment and decides on an action plan to improve behaviours and routines.

Achievements

The evaluation of building supporting environments in preschools like the method of Healthy Children carries costs of at least 500,000 euros and will take several years, since appropriate large-scale methods to evaluate supportive environments need to be developed. An application for funding is presently pending.

Conclusion

An evaluation using appropriate methods and a setting with controls would satisfy the demands for an evidence-based method. There is however a question to whether spending a lot of money and effort into such an approach is justified, or if the method of Healthy Children should be spread as being best available practice?



Friska barn

En metod för att främja
bra mat- och rörelsevanor i förskoleverksamheten

På uppdrag av
Stockholms läns landsting



Outdoor activities support physical activity levels

Preschools in Sweden – “EduCare”

- 80% of all children age 1-5 attend preschool
- Government approved curriculum
- Subsidized up to 90% by local government
- Weekdays 7 am - 6 pm
- Breakfast, lunch and afternoon snack included

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