

Importance of Faith Communities in Addressing Childhood Obesity

Resources for Faith Communities

Did you know? There is a direct relationship between faith and health. Our body, mind and soul work together in amazing ways. We can improve our level of fitness and increase our mental concentration by exercising our physical body. We can also choose to eat foods that make us feel energetic, lively and vibrant. Research has shown that there is a positive relationship between faith and health. People who attend religious services on a regular basis have less depression, better immune function, lower blood pressure, less heart disease, and are more likely to exercise and live longer (Koenig, 2005).

The faith and health connection probably comes as no surprise to faith communities who have expressed their concern for the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities for many years. Congregations of many faiths have created programs and provided services to the underserved, such as health clinics and soup kitchens. The childhood obesity epidemic provides another opportunity for faith communities to reach out and help their communities.

Childhood overweight and obesity has doubled in the United States over the last 30 years. In San Diego County, 1 in 4 children are overweight. Overweight and obesity increase children's risk of developing type 2 diabetes, heart disease, asthma, joint problems, and other health conditions (The Obesity Society, 2009). If today's current trend continues, it is anticipated that 1 in 3 children born in the US will develop type 2 diabetes (American Diabetes Association, 2009). The rate is 1 in 2 for African American and Latino children (American Association of Diabetes Educators, 2009). Faith communities can play an important role in reshaping our communities to support healthy living and a brighter future for our children.

Faith communities can provide opportunities to:

- Be physically active by providing a place for children and families to play.
- Grow and share fresh produce by starting a community garden.
- Eat healthy by offering nutritious options before and after services or at community functions.
- Clean up existing parks to create places to exercise, play and spend time together.
- Partner with community organizations to offer classes on nutrition, active living, etc.

There are so many ways faith communities can get involved to prevent and reduce childhood obesity. The opportunities are endless. This toolkit will provide your faith community with the resources they need to start making a difference today. For more information visit <http://OurCommunityOurKids.org> or contact the San Diego County Childhood Obesity Initiative at (858) 614-1544.

Source: The Obesity Society. (2009). Childhood overweight. Retrieved September 21, 2009 from http://www.obesity.org/information/childhood_overweight.asp

Source: American Diabetes Association. (2009). 1 in 3 Americans born in 2000 will develop diabetes. Retrieved September 21, 2009 from <http://www.diabetes.org/for-media/scientific-sessions/06-14-03-2.jsp>

Source: American Association of Diabetes Educators. (2009.) Diabetes Fact Sheet. Retrieved February 17, 2010 from http://www.diabeteseducator.org/export/sites/aade/resources/pdf/Diabetes_Fact_Sheet.pdf

Presentation by Harold Koenig, MD, Loma Linda University 2005; Presentation by Harold Koenig, MD, Oxford University Press 2001 McCullough, M.E., et al (2000). Religious involvement and mortality: A meta-analytic review. *Health Psychology*, 19, 211-222. Larson, D.B., Koenig, H.G., Kaplan, B.H., Greenberg, R.S., Logue, E., & Tyroler, H.A. (1989).

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