*Do as I Do*

by: Michelle Stamps [mailto:michelle@childcarestl.org], Assistant Program

Administrator

Child Nutrition Services, CDCA

One of the most important parts of implementing healthy eating habits into our children's lives is to practice what we preach. This may require changing many of our old habits. Children notice certain rituals around food such as regular eating times, seating at a table, meals eaten without external distractions such as television, and people talking pleasantly to each other using "please pass the..."and "thank you" being part of the conversation. If the caregivers are "oatmeal-and biking" types, then the kids in care will follow suite. If the child care providers are more the "chips-and-TV" type, then that's where you'll find the kids.

The problem is, many times we forget to think of ourselves as role models. We might expect the kids to exercise while we sit in a chair, but it often doesn't successfully work that way. We need to engage in the activity with the kids. We can play basketball, take a walk, play catch, roll a ball back and forth, or get involved in playing a board game with the kids, rather than just supervising their play.

Also, sometimes we are so busy preparing the foods for the children in our care

to eat, that we forget to take the time to sit down with them and eat the same foods that we are trying to encourage them to eat. For example, breakfast is the most important meal of the day. It fuels our bodies and minds and kick-starts our metabolism. We tell our kids to eat breakfast, but are we eating breakfast? Make it a priority to spend 10 minutes every morning to sit down with your kids and calmly eat breakfast. Not only will you be spending quality time with them, you'll also be energizing your own mind and optimizing your own nutrition.

In addition, don't forget about drinks! If we are pouring the kids a glass of milk

at meal time while we sip on a Diet Coke all day, we aren't being exceptional role

models. We should consume the same healthy drinks that we are offering the children. By doing so, we help the milk to seem appetizing.

Involve the children in the meal planning process. They can help set the table,

pick out foods to try, and if safe to do so, even help prepare the meal. Being part

of the process might encourage kids to want to enjoy and appreciate the finished

product. Another good tip is to try one or two new healthy food recipes every week. Some will catch on, others won't. Remember, you might need to expose the kids to certain foods as many as 10 or 15 times before they develop a taste for them. Serve new fruits and veggies in bite-sized pieces, so they're easier to eat with dipping sauces to make them yummier.

We also need to remember not to reward a child for eating a "healthy food" by giving the child a sugary dessert. This behavior implies to the child if he/she eats something healthy and unpleasant, that he/she will get something delicious and pleasant as a reward. The child may then attach happiness and success to unhealthy foods. Instead, reward the kids with fun activities or special attention, and offer dessert occasionally, detached from eating any other foods.

As long as we decide what healthy foods to offer, when to serve the meals, and where to serve the meals, it is essentially up to the child if he/she is going to eat

and how much he/she will eat. We must try to take it easy, stay relaxed, and role

model healthy eating habits.