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Connecting Big Plans' Parents to their Communities

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Mental Health Fitness is as Important as Physical Fitness

By Dr. Paul Martiquet

We often spend time concerning over this physical ailment or that one; there is a cold or flu going around to watch for (yes, get the flu shot) or we need to lose a few pounds. Physical health, as important as it is, cannot be our only concern.

We need to look after our mental health as well. There is a close relationship between the two. In fact, mental health fitness is essential to physical health, personal well-being and positive relationships.

Good mental health fitness is much more than the absence of mental illness. It influences daily life, and is affected by many factors including the stress of balancing work with your health and personal life.

Good mental health is important because it enables people to experience life as meaningful and to be creative, productive members of society.

The obstacles to mental health fitness

One of the biggest barriers to treating and discussing mental health fitness is stigmatization and the discrimination it leads to. There are obstacles to education, employment, good housing and even access to basic health and social services.

Some of the keys to improving mental health fitness support and treatment involve little more than education

and open conversation. One of the most important steps we can take is to place more emphasis on the determinants of good mental health — for example, employment and income, education, early childhood development and life skills.

Early intervention programs are also important, including those that focus on resiliency building for parents, children and youth. These include peer mentoring, support and advocacy as fundamentals. These small steps also help with screening and early intervention, and are crucial for recovery from mild problems.

Tackling stigma and discrimination is an essential step in creating an inclusive and accessible system for improving mental health. By focussing on recovery rather than the illness and its severity we can work towards a change in the mindset. To that end, we have seen

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significant progress in bringing mental health to the top of the agenda with the participation in public discussion by respected athletes and other highly visible members of the community.

Steps forward to improve mental health fitness

Making the right steps towards better mental health for all of us means supporting and encouraging policies that promote good mental health fitness throughout life. Early childhood, school-age years and adolescence are critical opportunities for prevention or early intervention. And continuity of treatment is key to ongoing mental health. Identify the challenge early and follow through with appropriate steps for each person.

Just as physical fitness helps our bodies to stay strong, mental health fitness helps us to achieve and sustain a state of good mental health. When we are mentally healthy, we enjoy our life and environment, and the people in it. We are better able to cope with difficult times in our lives.

The Canadian Mental Health Association (www.cmha.ca) is a terrific source for information about good mental health. For example, start by building physical activity into your day. Eat well including fresh vegetables and fruit, foods high in omega-3 and whole grains. And take control of your stress. Simple but effective steps that foster good mental health fitness.

Dr. Paul Martiquet is the Medical Health Officer for Rural Vancouver Coastal Health including Powell River, the Sunshine Coast, Sea-to-Sky, Bella Bella and Bella Cooola.

Free Education Sessions and MORE!

Did you know that you could attend a variety of FREE education sessions regarding your children, health and more? The Community Education Service (CES) provides parents/caregivers and other community members with opportunities to access free, evidence-informed education sessions and resource materials to address child, youth, and family health and mental health needs.

CES falls under Alberta Health Services' Child and Adolescent Addiction and Mental Health Programs (CAAMHP) and is housed in the Family and Community Resource Centre (FCRC) on the second floor of the Alberta Children's Hospital.

CES education sessions are hosted at the Alberta Children's Hospital and at various venues in Calgary and nearby communities. Many sessions are also available via telehealth/video-conference technology for those interested participants located within and outside of Calgary, and where telehealth/video-conference facilities are available.

In design and delivery of its education sessions, CES embraces the Family-Centred Care approach to building family and professional capacity by promoting families as active, fully-informed partners in the care of their children. CES also promotes the role of community partners as a vital support to children and families receiving care.

CES presenters and resource materials are drawn from:

- CAAMHP Programs
- Other Alberta Health Services' programs within the Calgary Zone
- Calgary and area community agencies

For a complete list of upcoming sessions (including those listed here), visit frcr.albertahealthservices.ca/ces.php

Parenting a Child with Disruptive Behaviours (Preschool - Aged) Wednesday March 19, 2014

Learn what your preschool-aged child is trying to tell you when he or she misbehaves, understand the basic ingredients for building positive family relationships, and gain an understanding of various parenting strategies.

*Session Time: 6:30 pm - 8:00 pm / Sign in: 6:15 pm
Location: Genesis Centre of Community Wellness, 1000 Voices Room D122, 7556 Falconridge Blvd. NE*

**FREE - Register by visiting <http://frcr.albertahealthservices.ca/ces.php>.
For more information please email ces@albertahealthservices.ca or call (403) 955-7420**

Play Therapy: You Don't Have To Talk To Be Heard Thursday, March 20, 2014

The history and therapeutic foundations of play therapy will be described, together with the function this treatment modality is able to fulfill in the emotional healing and well-being of children, adolescents and families. Some basic strategies and techniques useful in some therapeutic situations will then be highlighted to illustrate these principles.

*Session Time: 11:00 am - 12:30 pm / Sign in: 10:45 am
Location: Alberta Children's Hospital, Kinsmen Learning Centre (4th floor) 2888 Shaganappi Trail NW. Session is FREE of charge/ Parking fees may apply/Limited child care available, call (403) 955-2500. Please register no later than March 13, 2014. Courses with low registration will be cancelled one week prior to the session.*

**Register by visiting:
frcr.albertahealthservices.ca/ces.php**

Splash & Swim

Want a weekend swim on the cheap? Select Calgary Parks and Recreation pools offer \$2 admission for adults and \$1 admission for seniors and kids every Sunday. Check the Parks and Recreation website for specifics on discounted swim times and participating pools.

When: Sundays

Where: Select Calgary Parks and Recreation pools

Website: www.calgary.ca (search "Splash and Swim")

Watch for FREE SWIMMING offered at select pools on holidays. The next one is Sunday, April 20th between 1-2:30 and 3-4:30pm. Check online for pool locations.

Nature Fun in the City

Devonian Gardens

Bring your budding botanist and come play in Devonian Gardens! Participate in a fun-filled, hands-on drop-in activity. Program runs every Tuesday until April 22nd, 2014.

Inglewood Bird Sanctuary

Join us at the Inglewood Bird Sanctuary for interactive, nature programming for families. Topics vary weekly and include glimpses into the nature, history and hidden secrets of the site. Program runs every Thursday until May 29, 2014.

Time: Both of the above events run from 10 a.m. - noon.
Cost: \$5/person Visit www.calgary.ca for more info.

THE HIPPY PROGRAM

Enriching Families and Fostering Community Connections

When *I'satta** arrived in Canada five years ago with her husband and five children she only had her Grade five education. Although she did not seem to have any language barriers, this refugee from Liberia shared her confusion about local culture and felt the isolation as a mom who did not know what to do to help her children.

“Isolation is one of the big challenges faced by immigrant women”, says Eva Szasz-Redmond, manager of the language training and child care department at the Calgary Immigrant Women’s Association (CIWA). “Many women are stuck at home with the kids, not able to engage in active citizenship because they don’t speak English or have access to resources. Most immigrants and refugees, when they come to Canada, they come to give their children a better life and opportunities to succeed. Employment and language skills are usually on the top of their lists, and the immigrant women association has a range of programs and services to bridge that gap,” says Szasz-Redmond, whose association helped 14,000 women last year.

I'satta was one of those women. In addition to feeling confused and isolated, her husband lost his job and they needed help to cover basic expenses. I'satta turned to find help in the Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY) program offered by CIWA. This home-based family literacy and early childhood enrichment program gives parents the skills to be their children’s first teacher. The program focuses on coaching parents to prepare their children for school and it builds bridges to the larger community, enabling mothers who were once isolated to assume their

rightful roles as full participants in economic and community life. The HIPPY program is unique, in that staff work with mothers where they live, connecting them with other mothers in the community who understand their issues and challenges.

“HIPPY recognizes that the process of settlement and integration requires a community effort,” says Szasz-Redmond. “To that end, collaborations are initiated and fostered with a multitude of service providers, educational institutions and other entities that enable us to extend our wrap-around approach to service provision and community development.”

I'satta learned this first-hand, as a Home Visitor from the program arrived to her house each week, bringing not only packets, books and instructions; but hope, inspiration and answers to her questions. As a result, I'satta significantly improved her ability and confidence to teach her child. She was also given support and connections to available resources. Eventually, she graduated from the Health Care Aide program and was offered a full time job as a health care aide. “I am so happy that I am with HIPPY”, says I'satta. “My Home Visitor encouraged and helped me with the process of getting my job and with all referrals. We got many books for my daughter and she really liked them. Every night she asked me for reading them to her. Now I am very busy, but I would love to continue the program. HIPPY helps me to be a better mom for my daughter.”

HIPPY is a 30-week program designed to support immigrant, aboriginal and other Canadian families with literacy skills, to help them prepare their 3-5 year old children for school. The families who have participated in the HIPPY program at CIWA came from over 28 different nations in Asia, Africa, Latin America and Eastern Europe. The average family has 3.75 children and the majority of them have been in Canada for less than 3 years. For



the many HIPPY families who are recent immigrants, their limited English skills often act as barriers to their full integration into their new surroundings. HIPPY enables parents with limited English skills to connect with people around them. The home visitor, who is often from the same cultural background, works with parents to help them develop the skills necessary to prepare their children for school and connects them to other parents and services in the community.

**Name in this story has been changed.*



For more information on the HIPPY program, please call 403-263-4414 ext. 185 or email: language@ciwa-online.com.

Healthy Snacks for Preschoolers

Young children have small tummies, and need to eat snacks at regular times throughout the day. Healthy food will help keep up their high rates of energy and prevent the grumpies from setting in, especially important while they are at preschool.

While we often think of snack foods as “junk” foods, a snack doesn’t have to be a pack of cookies, goldfish crackers or sugary granola bars. Instead, try to include a protein choice (from the meat/alternative group or dairy group such as yogurt, cottage cheese, cheese, beans or legumes, edamame or boiled eggs) to provide more sustained energy.

You can also add a fruit and veggie to ensure your child gets enough of these foods and their important antioxidants during the day. Common choices for kid-friendly “fruit” are Fruit by the Foot or Dora snacks; however, these really contain minimal fruit, and mostly sugar and food coloring! It’s easy to throw any kind of fruit or veg into a lunch box: the classic banana, apple or orange, frozen or fresh berries, dried fruit like raisins and apricots, bell pepper strips, zucchini slices, frozen mixed veggies, snap peas, grape tomatoes, broccoli and cauliflower ‘trees’. If your child is not a fan of veggies, add a bean or yogurt-based dip.

The drink: It’s best to include water. If you include juice, make sure it’s 100% juice, instead of fruit “drinks” which supply lots of sugar and extra calories with no nutrition. Milk is another choice. You can even find boxed milk that has been treated with Ultra-high temperature (UHT), so doesn’t require refrigeration, or individual boxes of soy or almond milk.

The Treat: Depending on your school’s nutrition policy, many schools offer treats on a regular basis – there always seems to be a birthday celebration or special occasion. So I encourage the lunch you pack from home to be junk-food free most of the time. Or a ‘treat’ can contain some nutritional value, such as a pudding, minigo, canned fruit or homemade oatmeal raisin cookie.

Kids love it when their food is fun! It encourages them to try new foods, and makes great memories. Here are a few ideas:

Banana Split: Spoon yogurt in the centre of a container and place banana halves on either side. Sprinkle with strawberries, pineapple (or any other fruit you have on hand), and granola.



photo credit: eat-drink-love.com

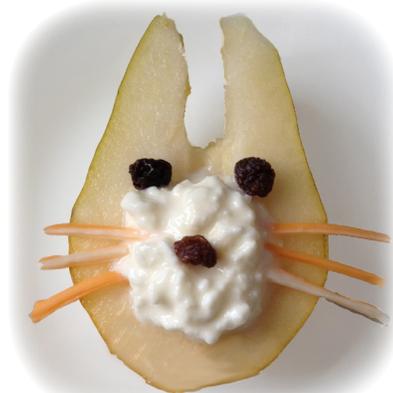
Ants on a Log: Fill celery slices with nut butter (or PeaButter/WowButter for the nut-free classroom), and top with raisins.



photo credit: chefmom.sheknows.com

Nutbutter Dip: Puree ½ cup nut butter (or PeaButter/WowButter for the nut-free classroom) with 1 cup plain yogurt. Yummy as a dip for fruit.

Bunny Snack: Use canned pear halves, or cut a fresh pear in half and take-out the core. To create ears, cut a little section out where you removed the stem (see photo below). Fill the pear centre with cottage cheese for added protein. Add raisins for eyes and a nose. If you are feeling extra creative, add strings of cheese (or pretzel sticks) for whiskers!



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Crock Pot Applesauce

This is a really fun activity to do with children. When preparing the apples, have an adult cut, core and peel the apples. After they are in slices, kids can easily use a cutting board and a butter knife to cut the apples into chunks. Put them in the crock pot along with the other ingredients. In a few hours you'll have applesauce.

Take ten large apples, peeled, cored and cut into chunks. Put them in a crock pot along with cup water, teaspoon cinnamon, and cup sugar. Cover and cook on high for 3-4 hours or low for 8-10 hours. Take a potato masher and mash. This can be eaten warm or cold. Refrigerate the remaining sauce.

<http://www.makinglearningfun.com/themepages/AppleCrockPotApplesauceRecipe.htm>