As we prepare to become more engaged in the community again, there are habits that we should be reinforcing now to keep kids safe when we venture out. If these do not become habits, then there will be a higher risk of becoming sick. Along with this is the need to maintain good eating habits to manage weight and keep our bodies healthy. Teach your child now about balanced meals/snacks. They will need this knowledge throughout life, so develop that skill and habit during this time.

**Personal Health Habits**

1. **Handwashing routines** need to be reinforced constantly at home now so when kids return to school and the community they will continue to wash their hands as recommended. [Hand Washing routine](#) offers a visual aid to help kids remember. Hang this in all of your bathrooms as a visual reminder if it is needed. You may need to modify this by adding the song that is sung or however else your child knows to wash hands for 20 seconds. You will not always be there to remind them. [Handwashing demonstration with white gloves and black ink](#) vividly demonstrates how to wash your hands correctly and what a difference it makes in how you do this. [More detailed pictures of complete handwashing](#) shows how to really wash your entire hand. [Model](#) frequent handwashing. [Verbalize](#) you are washing your hands and why. Repetition, repetition!

2. **Practice wearing a mask** since we don’t know how long this will be required. Some kids will not like the feel of certain materials or having something on their face, especially since we humans like to like to our face often. So, practice while you are not trying to run errands with your child. [Make it a game](#) at home to see who can keep their mask on (not all the time). You will have to repeat this activity for it to become 'normal.' Remember: ideally, you should not be pulling it on and off while wearing it.

3. **Covering your cough** should be role-played and reinforced during this time. [How far do germs spread?](#) is a video with an experiment you can do at home. You don’t have to have a cough to practice covering a cough.

4. **Social distancing does not come naturally to people** and under our present circumstances, kids have not had the opportunity to practice this skill. **Now is the time to role-play.** We do not know what the new expectations will be, but we must teach some social distance guidelines to kids.
   - How do you want your child to greet people? Practice now what you think will be a safe strategy. It will be too late when you are in the community. It will take a lot of repetition and practice to teach a new greeting if it is needed.
• **How will your child maintain social distance from their friends?** The recommendation is six feet from anyone outside your household. Think now about what you will do if your child naturally wants to be closer to his friends. Practice keeping a six-foot distance now, so you and your child are prepared when you’re with friends again. If not, you may find yourself engaged with a behavior issue. You can provide visuals to help with the rules you expect. Talk to parents of friends before you’re together so you both know what to expect from each other, as their expectations might be different than yours. Think about different scenarios like playing tag, playing games, using sidewalk chalk, playing video games together. What are your expectations in these scenarios? How many children do you see together at one time?

• **What are the expectations in public places?** Do they know to allow six feet between people (how do they visualize six feet)? You can mark off your driveway or sidewalk so they can practice and visualize how far apart this is. Again, it will not be natural to think of keeping a distance, so practice now.

• **Stores now often have marked floors to show appropriate social distancing space.** 
  
  *Demonstrate this at home.* Remember the last time they were in the community, life was different. They have not experienced the changes. Prepare them ahead of time.

• **As rules evolve, you may also need to explain other changes,** like there are tables open at the restaurant, but not all the tables can be used. Explain as much as you can before you are in a situation. It will relieve anxiety and possibly avoid some 'battles' since it will not be what they might be expecting.

• **Take pictures of places** you and your children frequently went, so they can see the differences before you start taking them again.

5. **Look for cars before crossing the street is a habit you cannot ignore.**

6. **Teach these things without creating fear in your child.** This is what we do to stay healthy. This is just a matter of fact. Just like being dressed in public or taking a shower. This will keep anxiety at a minimum.

**Personal Nutrition Skills**

1. **Making healthy choices** means creating a list of choices that will maintain a desirable weight to avoid obesity and other illnesses. Unhealthy choices can only be made occasionally especially if there is limited exercising in one’s routine.

• **Snacks** is an easy way to begin. Identify healthy snacks. Do a sorting activity. Create a list of choices. Dedicate snack times and avoid snacking at other times.

• **Include kids in meal-planning.** What do you need to have on your plate and how much of each item to be balanced and healthy? Even if they won’t eat everything, have them plan a balanced meal. Keep experimenting with food to find something in the category that they might be willing to eat… or in a different form. For example, a child won’t touch vegetables but if they
are blended in a smoothie or tomato sauce for spaghetti they willingly eat the food. (There could be a tactile reason).

Planning Meals Activities/Games/Visuals operated by the Department of Agriculture has a variety of activities to help a wide range of kids learn about healthy meal planning.

Twinkl offers a variety of visuals and videos to help with learning healthy/unhealthy choices, what a fruit/vegetable is, creating healthy meals, and so on. It has materials for all ages and is free right now. Sign up with the code CVDTWINKLHELPS for one month free. It has great resources in all academic areas, chores, behavior, and other areas. It is worth exploring!

2. **Food Preparation** is a natural next step. Even young children can begin to help with some food preparation. What you choose to teach and when is up to you.
   - Young children can help with mixing, measuring (also science and math related activities), and cleaning fruits and vegetables.
   - If a child is ready to learn about using the microwave, try the visual supports with Microwave visuals.
   - Model sanitizing the work surface. Demonstrate and verbalize what you are doing and why.
   - A child can help sanitize if he is old enough. Create a pattern to wipe a table or counter so the entire surface is cleaned. Do rows one direction and then the other.
   - Visual recipes that are easy to prepare are here.
   - You can also google ‘visual recipes’ and find an abundance of possibilities.
   - Teach at least one snack or meal that a child can make on his own.
   - For older kids, begin to teach them to check expiration dates and look for dents on cans that indicate a food should not be consumed.
   - Teach how to tell if food is spoiled. For example, do you smell the milk if it is close to expiration?
     - How do you tell if food has been kept too long? Does the chicken smell okay? Are the potatoes getting squishy?

Email me for any specific needs that you have. I am happy to find a resource or help problem-solve with you. Your kids are very lucky to have a parent like you!

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