CHANCE Parent Education on Preventing Childhood Obesity

Summary

The Collaboration for Health, Activity, and Nutrition in Children's Environments (CHANCE) is a pilot project of the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program in New York State, serving limited-income families. The project is developing and evaluating innovative ways to prevent childhood obesity by targeting key behaviors and environmental factors.

Issue

Through its strong influence on behavior, our current environment contributes to the obesity epidemic in multiple ways, from national policies and marketing practices to the availability and cost of healthy foods and opportunities for safe, active play. While personal lifestyle changes are important, it is not enough to tell people to change their behavior; families and communities need to work together to create environments that encourage healthy choices.

Response

The Collaboration for Health, Activity, and Nutrition in Children's Environments is designed to “give kids a CHANCE” to reap the benefits of healthy lifestyles. CHANCE activities promote healthy food choices and active play among preschool and elementary school-aged children, by working with parents and other adults who influence children and shape the environments where children live, learn, and play.

CHANCE involves collaboration between nutrition and parenting educators within Cornell Cooperative Extension, and with community members and organizations – including families, schools, libraries, and afterschool and daycare programs.

CHANCE focuses on the messages and skill development most likely to help children to develop healthy habits and avoid unhealthy weight gain, using evidence-based strategies to help families and communities support these efforts through:

1. Strengthening key nutrition and parenting skills for greater effectiveness in guiding children's choices.

Parents and caregivers can attend small group sessions to learn about parenting skills, healthy and affordable food and activity choices, and ways to change the home environment to help children make good choices. CHANCE encourages small steps toward healthier lifestyles.

2. Community collaboration to promote changes in children's environments — changes that will make healthy choices easier. CHANCE emphasizes collaboration as an essential strategy for making sustainable changes in the community environments that influence children. The project strives to involve parents in shaping these changes.

Impact

In its initial 3-year formative phase, CHANCE developed and tested new strategies in five Cornell Cooperative Extension sites in the state: New York City and Jefferson, Monroe, Suffolk, and Tompkins counties. On-going process evaluation is identifying “best practices” to inform policy and programs, and
exploring not only what works, but how and why. Based on this foundation, CHANCE is now moving toward expanded implementation of educational and environmental activities in additional sites.

- A new curriculum integrating parenting skills, nutrition information, and active play – especially strategies to prevent unhealthy weight gain in children – was created by campus partners with extensive input from the 5 pilot sites.

- Over 260 low-income parents graduated from the 29 CHANCE parent education workshop series completed in the first 2 years of the program.

- There was a statistically significant 13 percent improvement in reported behavior after the intervention (p< 0.001).

- Greatest improvements were seen in behaviors such as decreases in soda consumption and purchase of non-nutritious snack foods and increases in offering vegetables to children, letting children decide how much to eat, and adult consumption of low-fat milk.

- In all 5 sites, CHANCE staff have implemented regular worksite wellness activities and promoted the development of CCE wellness policies. So far, 3 sites have reported actual adoption of CCE wellness policies. Two sites have received awards and grants to further support wellness efforts.

- Worksite wellness initiatives have spread to CCE offices outside of the CHANCE pilot sites and to other agencies. After witnessing their success with worksite wellness, agency partners have turned to CHANCE staff for guidance and support with their own policy development.

- Training aimed at providing education on the prevalence and ramifications of childhood obesity in their communities have been offered to more than 500 people during the past two years.

- CHANCE staff are involved in community collaborations to promote environmental changes ranging from more healthy snack and active play options in after-school programs to increased access to healthy foods in low-income neighborhoods.

Contacts

Jamie Dollahite, Professor
Division of Nutritional Sciences
College of Human Ecology
Cornell University
jsd13@cornell.edu

Kate Dickin, Research Associate
Division of Nutritional Sciences
College of Human Ecology
Cornell University
kld12@cornell.edu

Tisa Hill, Research Support Specialist
Division of Nutritional Sciences
College of Human Ecology
Cornell University
tfh3@cornell.edu

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