



Helping Your Child Be Healthy and Fit: Parents and the School

The school can be a vital link to your child's well-being. So much of your child's life is spent in school, it is important that you be aware of all the people and situations involved. Besides the school nurse (who may not be at the school full time), there are many resources you can call on.

Teachers are aware of the whole child and things that might be getting in the way of your child's learning. School counselors can advise on your child's social and emotional well-being. Many school counselors concentrate on helping children build self-esteem, and some work with groups of children with similar problems, such as coping with a divorce or death in the family.



Physical education classes provide an opportunity for exercise, and they foster teamwork. The school cafeteria is a source of well-balanced lunches (and breakfasts in some school districts), many of which are government-subsidized for low income students. The principal and teacher can advise on special services provided by the school district for children with handicaps and special learning needs.

The most important thing you can do is stay in contact with the school, especially your child's teacher. Listen carefully to the teacher, because the teacher will often spot problems or warning signs of serious trouble before you might notice them.

It is also important for you to tell the teacher if your child has a serious health problem or is experiencing an emotional crisis at home. It is imperative for the school to know if your child is on medication and what it is, who should be contacted in case of an emergency, and what to look for in your child's behavior that might be a warning sign of the onset of a medical emergency.

Your child's welfare is a partnership between the parent and the school. If a serious medical condition exists, private or community health services should be consulted.

What can you expect of the school?

The following information has been adapted from *Managing Asthma: A Guide for Schools*, published by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Department of Education.

The principal should:

- Give parents a clear policy on taking medication during school hours.
- Provide opportunities for staff to learn about medical emergencies.
- Establish a resource file on health issues for teachers and staff to read.
- Schedule building repairs, cleaning, or painting when students are out of the building during vacations or the summer.

The school nurse should:

- Maintain health records on all students with chronic diseases.
- Alert staff members about students with serious health conditions.
- Inform parents if they suspect a serious health problem.
- Administer medication according to school policy.
- Work with the parent/teacher organization to provide educational programs on medical conditions that affect a large number of students.

The teacher should:

- Know the early warning signs of a medical emergency.
- Develop a clear procedure for handling schoolwork missed due to illness.
- Understand the side effects of medication, for example, drowsiness, anxiety, withdrawal.
- Educate classmates about special medical conditions of students in the class, while respecting confidentiality.
- Reduce health hazards in the classroom.
- Encourage students with health problems to participate in classroom activities as much as possible.
- Allow a student to do quiet activities if a medical condition prevents full participation.

These are just some of the actions that school personnel can take to make the school a safer and friendlier place for your child. Remember that when children are well and comfortable, they learn more.

Source: U.S. Department of Education

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