

Diabetes: A Family Matter

Intergenerational Family Fun Activities

Overview:

SUGAR Helpers can help individuals, families, and groups consider different ways to approach healthy lifestyle changes. Keep in mind that you are looking for fun activities that promote healthy lifestyles that focus on physical fitness, food preparation and meals, and other important family routines. These are activities that *SUGAR Helpers* can use in working with their family, extended family members, friends and their families, and even groups.

Objectives:

The purpose of these activities is to have fun and promote active family lifestyles.

Costs:

Costs will vary based upon activities selected for participation.

Participants:

Young and old should be able to take part in these activities with family and friends.

Activities:

As discussions with family members occur two techniques will be useful. The use of brainstorming can help identify as many ideas as possible. Remember, while brainstorming no judgments should be made about whether the ideas are good ones or doable. Just list ideas that can be later discussed more in depth. A second technique is problem solving. This is a great way to address a barrier or obstacle that would hinder an activity from occurring. Brainstorming ways to overcome problems and then having some discussion about the best

ideas can help get things started. Keep in mind that the ideas should include physically active things, but can also include things that promote good health or increase knowledge about health. So, things like cooking together and searching the internet for information can also be family activities.

Families are busy! Because most people enjoy spending time with family members, an important first step is to think of how fun activities together. The next step is to find ways that activities can be shared across generations. Many people are busy as individuals, but less apt to spend active time with one another. Often activities for individuals take place away from other and with people that are not family members. So a challenge in this activity is getting people to realize the benefits of getting to know family members better and spending some active times together. For instance, what can grandparents and grandchildren do together that will encourage a healthy focus in the family?

Consider these steps in planning intergenerational activities for families:

- What interests do family members have in common?
- What activities would fit for all family members or smaller groups of family members? For instance, could there be special grandparent/grandchild activities or an aunt/uncle day?
- What types of activities can the older generation share with the younger generation such as a game

they played when they were children? What can the younger generation share with the older generation? Perhaps teaching them an electronic game like *Dance*, *Dance Revolution*.

- Are there group and volunteer opportunities for your family in the community? Examples could include forming a litter control, helping a neighbor by raking their leaves, walking the dog, or walking with a group of children to school.

Once you have a list of intergenerational family activities, you will next want to create a plan as to how these activities will occur. Most things will take some effort and will need to include communication about personal schedules and time management. The family may agree to try this for a month and see how it works. While many people do independent activities, the focus here is on having two or more people take part.

Create a Family Activity Calendar so that everyone gets a chance to pick an activity. Put the calendar on the refrigerator with a magnet so everyone can be reminded and see that this is important. Be sure to designate that the family member that chooses an activity must get the family organized and make sure it happens. Families with younger children may need to assist them until they are old enough to do things alone. It would be good if everyone in the family could select a family activity for each week of the first month. It may not be possible to have more than two generations involved in most activities, but see if you can include at least some activities that can include three generations or even four.

After the first month, the family might want to discuss their plan for the next month. Perhaps some activities will be ones to do a regular basis. Maybe some activities did not turn out so well and will not be repeated. Perhaps someone has a new idea about what they want to try. The main idea would be to keep this going in the family. Every month does not need to be the same. You may want to increase the number of activities you do or maybe you need to limit them to the weekend. Family members should each identify the one activity that they found the most fun and be sure it is included.

Some families also find that setting family goals or developing a family reward system for when the goal(s) are reached can be an effective way to make sure these intergenerational activities occur. Setting up competitions among family teams might work well for some activities.

Activity ideas to help get you started in your family brainstorming session:

- Keep a “fun kit” in the car so that you always have a Frisbee, ball(s), and other equipment on hand for any time that there is a waiting period.
- Explore your town or city or any outdoor tourist attractions by biking or walking. Sometimes there are things in local communities where you might visit together.
- Have younger children share their walks to school, their favorite tree, or their favorite gardens with other family members.
- Make your family weekends and vacations more active ones—hiking, biking, camping, horseback riding or swimming

- Try one of these—croquet, archery, paddleball, stickball, jumping rope, stretching, fishing, hunting, canoeing, kite flying; baton twirling or cheerleading. Don't be afraid to be young and act silly!
- Hula hooping—who knew there could be such a variety to this activity? Find out how to start hooping, how to make a hoop, starting a hoop group, and other information at <http://www.hooping.org>
- Hopscotch. Here is a good site for this game: http://www.gameskidsplay.net/games/other_games/hopscotch.htm and hopscotch from Aruba (Pele), Bolivia (La Thunkuna), France (Escargot or snail), Alaska (Alaskan hopscotch) and New York (Potsy)
- Jump rope--this site has instructions for low, moderate and high intensity levels: <http://www2.gsu.edu/~wwwfit/jumprope.html>. You can also become involved in the *Jump Rope for Heart* sponsored by the American Heart Association and the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (AAHPERD) at: <http://www.americanheart.org> or <http://www.aahperd.org/>. This program focuses on elementary aged children.
- Chair exercises could be done during commercials: <http://www.livewellagewell.info/study/2007/12-ChairExercisesUGA113006.pdf> or <http://www.howtodothings.com/health-and-fitness/a3243-how-to-do-chair-exercises.html>
- Dancing can be fun! Families are able to exercise without the feeling of working out; try the chicken dance, 'hokie-pokie' or the electric slide. Do what you like to your favorite music. Take turns picking what music will be used. Teach one another dances from different generations. Many communities have contra dances that are perfect for dancers of all ages!
- Walk together to activities instead of driving, and at the very least, make a commitment to park in the back parking lots to gain some extra exercise when attending events.
- Get pedometers to track everyone's walking and set goals related to the number of steps taken daily.
- Find exercise tapes at the library to see what will work best. Take turns picking out different kinds of exercise tapes.
- Remember to warm up and cool down together too!

Final Word:

If you begin an intergenerational family activities project in your community, please be sure to go to the *Diabetes: A Family Matter* website <www.diabetesfamily.net> and share with others what worked and what did not work. A place on the **Communicate** Section of the website will be available for you to share your plans and successes. If you have a website that pertains to these activities, please post the link so that others can take a look.