



3P: Preschool teachers, Parents and Healthcare Providers

Preschool Teacher's Views on their role in Obesity Prevention and Health Development of Young American Indian Children

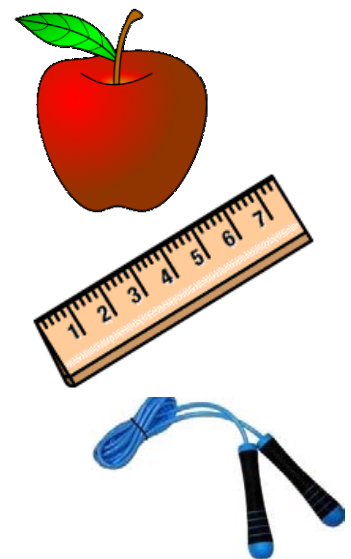
Preschools, parents and healthcare providers (the 3Ps) are influential in the healthy development of young children. A study involving preschool teachers, parents and health care providers of young American Indian children was conducted to understand their individual thoughts and how they would like to work together in promoting healthy development and preventing obesity.

Preschool teachers gave their perspective for healthier habits in the center and how they would like to work with parents and health care providers in preventing excess weight gain. After structured interviews with 20 preschool teachers in tribally affiliated centers, we gathered their main thoughts and ways they would like to collaborate with parents and healthcare providers.

Findings are summarized below:

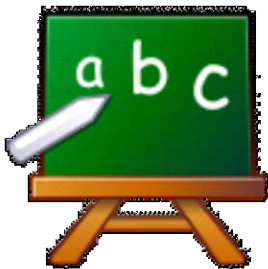
Preschool Teacher attitudes on Nutrition and Physical Activity

- Many childcare teachers (40%) mentioned that nutrition and physical activity helped with the **children's learning and focus throughout the day**. Previous studies have found that proper nutrition and physical activity can lead to higher education achievement in young children¹.
- Many **preschool teachers were already incorporating nutrition education into their classroom**, these ways varied from talking about different types of food at the lunchroom table, using a specific curriculum and dedicating certain lessons to healthy foods.
 - *"Yes, we talk about it quite a bit because every Thursday we do nutrition but then we talk about it throughout the week, like at the breakfast table at the lunch table. If there's a book we read that has to do with nutrition and the children really love it and they catch on to it and they even talk about it at home."*

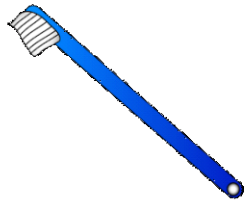


Preschool Teacher attitudes on Healthy Development and Excess Weight Gain

- **Majority of preschool teachers (70%) were concerned about excess weight gain**, few were not concerned (20%) or had mixed feelings (10%). The current rate of obesity in young American Indian children is 16.4%², which is much higher than the national average of 9.4%³.
 - *"I have seen a rise in heavier children coming in, so yeah, I would say it is a concern"*
- Of those who were not concerned they felt that obesity didn't occur until the children were older. Those with mixed feelings were concerned with children both being overweight and underweight at this age.
- Though not all preschool teachers were concerned about childhood overweight and obesity, they understood that nutrition and physical activity was important to educational achievement, and may still be **interested in information related to nutrition and physical activity**.



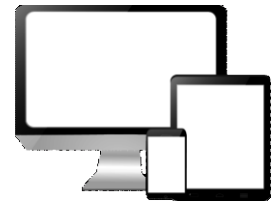
Preschool Teacher perspective on working with Healthcare providers



- **Preschool teachers mentioned that there was already interaction on the preschool level with dentists.** Dentists were mentioned in most interviews as coming to the preschool and working with the children. Dentists also have an important interest in young children's health especially with high rates of dental caries (or cavities) in young American Indian children⁴.
 - *"We have already had our dental hygienist that comes from the health clinic. She comes down every six months I think and she talks to the kids about brushing their teeth ... she tells them about candy and it is okay to have candy every once in a while but not all the time for their teeth"*
- **Most preschool teachers had very little interaction with healthcare providers** as a part of their role being a preschool teacher.
- Preschool teachers felt that **a healthcare provider working with the preschool would help children have a healthy influence** and be more comfortable with the healthcare provider in the future.
 - *"I guess just volunteering, whenever you have somebody new come in, it opens their minds"*

Preschool Teacher perspective on working with Parents

- **Preschool teachers noted that there was environmental and community access problems for parents to provide a healthy meal for their child.** Some of their concerns were around the availability and cost of nutrient dense foods in their community.
- Preschool teachers felt that **parents were important in getting their children moving and off screens at home.** Preschool teachers felt their parenting behaviors for physical activity were shown in the child's willingness to be active at the preschool.
 - *"Some of these kids I've seen some kids who are so used to not moving who are just sitting, watching TV and stuff they, that's what they're used to and they don't want to go play"*
- Some preschool teachers were concerned about new parents **not being aware or informed about healthy habits and practices** to help prevent excess weight gain.
- Preschool teachers mentioned that parents need to be empowered to make the changes and **understand how influential they are in the development of their child.**
 - *"It really boils down to the parents on what they allow the children to eat."*



References

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2. Weedn, A. E., J. J. Hale, D. M. Thompson and P. M. Darden (2014). "Trends in obesity prevalence and disparities among low-income children in Oklahoma, 2005-2010." *Child Obes* 10(4): 318-325.
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4. Phipps KR, Ricks TL, Manz MC, Blahut P. Prevalence and severity of dental caries among American Indian and Alaska Native preschool children. *J Public Health Dent*. 2012;72(3):208-215.

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