

## 6. Self-Care & Health

We carry our bodies, minds, and spirits with us all of our lives. Making sure that we get and stay healthy - physically and mentally - is a day-to-day task. When youth have control of their bodies and minds they are better able to address other concerns and work towards independence.

### Personal Hygiene

#### 1. Good Hygiene Habits

Maintaining good personal hygiene starts with basic daily routines, such as hand washing and teeth brushing. After using the bathroom or before meals, check your child's hands. If they don't smell clean, send them back to wash up. If it's in your budget, purchase liquid anti-bacterial soap in fragrances children like such as bubble gum and watermelon. Tooth brushing should be part of a child's before-bed routine. Make it more fun by letting your child pick out his/her own toothbrush, toothpaste, and flavored dental floss.

**Level: 1**

#### 2. Reminder For Good Hygiene

In the bathroom, post a daily checklist of personal activities that need to be done, such as shower/bath, wash face, brush teeth, put on deodorant, etc. Younger children might enjoy getting stars on a chart for each activity completed. Hard-to-motivate children could get a reward for earning a certain number of stars by the end of the week. **Levels: 1 2**

#### 3. Brush, Brush, Brush Your Teeth

To encourage young children to give their teeth a solid brushing, have the child hum "row, row, row your boat" (or other children's songs) three times to make sure they are brushing long enough. You can also use a kitchen timer - when the bell goes off they are done brushing. **Levels: 1**

#### Teachable Moment

It's a well-known fact that kids can be unkind when it comes to labeling their peers or putting them down. The next time your child talks about a schoolmate who isn't liked because they "smell funny" or are dirty, use the chance to talk with your child about how poor hygiene can affect our relationships with others.

**Levels: 1 2**

#### 4. The Cost Of Personal Care Products

If your youth wants to buy a particular brand of shampoo or deodorant, ask them to find

coupons for these in the newspaper or else pay for the difference between the brand they want and the generic brand with their own money. **Levels: 2 3**

## Health

### 1. Staying Safe In Any Weather

When you are out with your child in different environmental/weather conditions, demonstrate safety in each situation (driving more slowly in the rain, layering clothes when it's cold, wearing sun screen when it's sunny). **Levels: 1 2**

### 2. Exercise For Health

Getting exercise is an important part of staying healthy. Invite young children to exercise with you, whether you're walking, biking, swimming, exercising with a video, etc. If it's helpful for you to reward yourself for regular exercise at the end of the week, reward them for doing it with you. **Level: 1** Give your older youth a chance to participate in organized sports or find an activity they enjoy such as bicycling, roller-blading, hiking, or bowling. **Levels: 2 3**

#### Tip

Put skin medicines in a friendly bottle - like a "Barney" or "Snoopy" bottle. This makes applying skin cleaners and ointments easier and less scary. Using decorative band-aids helps too.

### 3. Caring For Simple Injuries

Teaching about taking care of injuries and illness can start at a young age. Have little children practice cleaning pretend cuts and applying bandages to their dolls or stuffed animals. **Level: 1** Later on, supervise youth while they care for their own injuries.

**Level: 2**

### 4. Linking Symptoms To Illness To Treatment

Help kids recognize how they feel when they are sick. When young children are not feeling well, ask them what their symptoms are. If you know what they have (cold, flu, etc.) label it for them. When they are feeling better, show them how to check a simple medical book, use the Internet or call an "Ask-A-Nurse" line to figure out what they might have. **Level: 1** Have older youth use these resources to find out what they can do for their symptoms. Before giving any over-the-counter medication, have your older youth read the label to see if it's meant to be used with their symptoms and what the correct dosage is. **Levels: 2 3**

**Teachable Moment**

When someone in your home becomes sick with a contagious illness like a cold or the flu, talk with everyone in the house about how it could spread to others (by sharing cups/utensils, sneezing, etc.). Challenge those who aren't sick to see if they can avoid catching the illness by taking precautions (handwashing, not sharing cups, etc.).

**5. Going To The Doctor**

Older youth need to know how to set up a doctor's appointment. If your youth needs a physical before playing sports or needs to go to the doctor or dentist for other reasons, let them call to make the appointment. **Levels: 3 4**

**6. Understanding Non-Prescription Medicines**

Next time you are at the store, walk through the medicine aisles. Take several medications off the shelf and have your youth read the label and tell you what they are for. **Levels: 2 3**

**7. Learning About Prescription Medicines**

If your young person takes a prescription medication, make sure they understand what it's for and how it's used. Next time they need a refill, talk with them about why they take the medicines, how it helps, etc. Let them call for the refill. When you pick up the refill, read over with them the directions for taking the medicines and the possible side effects. If the youth still has questions, encourage them to call the pharmacist. **Levels: 2 3 4**

**8. Medical Records**

As we change health insurance companies and doctors, keeping a medical record is important. For young children, develop a special file that has important medical records and health information. After each visit to the doctor, help the child place information in the file. **Level: 1** For older youth, have them maintain this file themselves. **Levels: 2 3 4**

**9. Filling Out Forms**

Filling out forms is a part of getting health care. When you take a young child to the doctor, show him/her the forms that must be filled out. Ask the child to answer the easy questions - name, address, phone - as you fill out the form. **Level: 1** Have older youth fill out the form on their own and then review it with them. **Levels: 2 3**

### **10. Finding A Doctor, Dentist, And/Or Facility**

If your child needs a new doctor, walk them through the steps of contacting their insurance (if the insurance has "preferred providers"), looking in the phone book, or talking to people they know to find a good provider. **Levels: 3 4** Talk to your youth about which medical facility (doctor's office, emergency room, urgent care) is appropriate for various medical needs. **Levels: 3 4**

### **11. Introduction To Insurance**

Next time your youth has a doctor's appointment, talk to them on the way there about what health insurance they have, who pays for it, how long they'll have it, etc. Show them their insurance card. Tell them the same about your own health insurance and show them your card. **Levels: 2 3 4**

### **12. Advanced Insurance**

As a requirement for moving out on their own, have your youth find out what kind of health insurance they can get. Use the phone book, Internet, friends or an independent living class to find out about the different insurance options available to them. **Levels: 3 4**

### **13. The Cost Of Medical Care**

Many youth don't have any idea how much health care costs. If you receive a statement from your doctor or insurance company listing the cost of service (even if it's been paid for), show it to your youth, along with what your health insurance did or did not cover. **Levels: 2 3 4**

### **Foster Parent Quote**

"I think just talking about how you're feeling is important, and learning to recognize stress, identify and admit it. I can remember my parents being really grouchy and angry sometimes, and you couldn't say 'Gee, why are you so grouchy?' For me, it's helpful when my daughter says, 'You know, you're pretty irritable'. I can say, 'You're right, I am' and talk about it. The same goes for her."

### **14. Stress Busters**

Stress affects children and youth of all ages. When your child gets worked up about something, teach them to take 5 or 10 deep breaths to calm down. Offer to go for a walk with your child when they're stressed, or have them walk (or run!) around the block or do jumping jacks. **Levels: 1 2** Older youth should be allowed to go for walks or bike rides when they're stressed out. Punching bags can be useful too. **Levels: 3 4**

### **15. Quiet Time**

Build "quiet times" into your family's routine. Designate a certain 30-minute time slot (possibly after everyone gets home from school or work) as a time when there is no talking. Let youth read a book or magazine or do something else quiet (no TV) during this time.

**Levels: 1 2 3**

**Teachable Moment**

When your youth is worried about something (school situation, peers, money, fears, etc.) invite them to problem-solve with you. Ask them to come up with at least three ideas for dealing with the problem they're worried about. Then evaluate each idea and what the likely outcome would be. Encourage the youth to choose a solution and try it out.

**16. Best, Worst, And Funniest Thing**

Start a routine of sitting down with your child before bedtime. Ask them to tell you about the best thing, worst thing, and funniest thing that happened during the day. This can make it easier for them to talk to you about feelings and can keep communication lines open.

**Levels: 1 2**

**17. A Round-About Way**

If your older child or a friend of theirs is dealing with an emotional problem, they may not be open to talking about it with you. Leave short articles or Web addresses related to the problem in a place where your youth will find it. This gives them a chance to find out more about the problem without talking to you directly. **Levels: 3 4**

**18. Learning About Emotional Problems**

TV shows can provide a great opportunity to talk about a variety of issues. If you are watching a show like "Oprah" that shows someone dealing with an emotional problem (depressed, suicidal, alcoholic) talk to your youth about it. Discuss the symptoms of the problem, the difficulties it creates for that person, and where the person can get help.

**Levels: 1 2 3 4**

**19. Prayer**

Pray with your kids. **Levels: 1 2 3 4**

**Alcohol, Drugs, and Tobacco**

**1. Not-So-Good Examples**

Alcohol and drug abuse is an unfortunate part of our society. When information about a celebrity's alcohol or drug abuse is in the news, talk about it at the dinner table. Discuss what their problem is, how the media found out about it, what the consequences are, etc.

**Levels: 1 2 3**

**2. Make Use Of Your School**

Many schools now sponsor anti-drug, anti-alcohol and anti-tobacco campaigns such as SADD, DARE, and Smokebusters. Encourage youth to participate in these activities and consider offering some type of incentive for completing a program, such as a special day trip or monetary award. If the opportunity arises, participate with your child.

Levels: 1 2 3

**3. Learning From The Movies**

Rent a popular movie that deals with alcohol or drug addiction and its effects such as "When a Man Loves a Woman" or "Broken Cord" and watch it with your youth. Talk about all of the areas of life (health, relationships, jobs, infant development) that can be affected by alcohol and drug abuse. **Levels: 1 2 3 4**

**4. Learning About Addiction**

Look on the Internet or visit your local library or council on drug/alcohol addiction to find a sample of a self-test for addiction. Go over the questions with your youth and talk about how they would answer them and how someone with an addiction might answer.

**Levels: 2 3 4**

**5. Practice For Peer Pressure**

Role-play with your children and youth. Ask them how they would handle different situations. For example, you might say, "You'll be at a party next week and someone's going to offer you some beer. What are you going to do?" Or, "What would you do if somebody says 'Oh, come on, have a cigarette?'" Tell them stories of how you successfully (or unsuccessfully) handled negative peer pressure. **Levels: 1 2 3**

**6. Treatment Options**

Take your youth to an Alcoholics Anonymous, Alateen, or Narcotics Anonymous meeting. This helps youth get a better understanding of the effects of drug/alcohol abuse and gets them familiar with a popular treatment option - the self-help group. **Levels: 1 2 3**

**7. Drinking And Driving**

Cut out an article about an alcohol related accident or fatality from your local newspaper. Read it with your youth and talk about the consequences of drinking and driving. Ask them if they know the legal drinking age in your state and the Blood Alcohol Content (BAC) for adult drivers in your state. Next time MADD (Mothers Against Drunk Driving) offers a presentation, attend it with your youth. **Levels: 1 2 3 4**



### **Parent Quote**

Make a deal with your youth that if they are ever out somewhere and don't have a safe way to get home (because they are drunk/high or their ride is drunk/high), they can call you and you will come get them, no questions asked. If they take you up on your offer, don't ask questions at the time, but initiate a discussion the following day to explore the situation with them.

#### **Tip**

Many youth come into foster care because of drug or alcohol abuse in the home. In talking about their families, ask them what they know about the effects of drugs and alcohol on family members.

## **Relationships and Sexuality**

### **1. Basic Anatomy**

Teach young children the correct names for the parts of their bodies (or if your family uses other terms, at least make sure to mention the "anatomical" term). Try to provide your child with honest answers to their questions about sexuality, or provide them with age-appropriate written materials that cover the basics of human sexuality (libraries, bookstores, church libraries, and the Internet all have good resources). **Levels: 1 2**

### **2. Healthy Relationships**

Role models are important for teaching children and youth about healthy relationships. Ask your youth who they think is a good example of how to treat your husband/wife/partner (either someone real or a character on TV). Talk about their response. **Levels: 1 2**

#### **Teachable Moment**

Many TV shows today feature characters who are gay or lesbian. When you are watching one of these shows with your youth, use the opportunity to talk about the different sexual orientations people have and the youth's attitude toward them.

### **3. The ABCs Of Pregnancy**

Unfortunately, teen pregnancy is part of our society. When someone that your youth knows becomes pregnant, ask them what they know about how women become pregnant and some ways that pregnancy can be prevented. Let them know your own feelings about them being sexually active, emphasizing that if they decide to be sexually active, it's important to know how to prevent pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. **Levels: 1 2 3**

**4. Knowing If You're Pregnant**

Every sexually active youth should know some of the "signs" of pregnancy. When you see a pregnant woman in the store, ask your youth what some of the early signs of pregnancy are (late period, nausea, tiredness, etc.). Talk about places in your town that offer free pregnancy testing and pregnancy counseling. **Levels: 2 3 4**

**5. Peer Pressure And Sex**

Peer pressure can affect a youth's decisions about sexual behavior. Tell them a story about peer pressure faced by yourself or someone you know of and how it was handled. Ask whether they think kids sometimes "talk up" their sexual activities to look grown up to their friends. Explore and role-play ways to resist negative peer pressure. **Levels: 1 2 3**

**6. Sexually Transmitted Diseases**

Sexually transmitted diseases can impact a youth's health and relationships. The next time you are at the doctor's office, pick up some pamphlets about STDs, or print some information you find on the Internet. Leave it in your youth's room, then later ask if they've had a chance to look at the information and what they thought of it. Ask your child if they know of places in town to get information about preventing and treating STDs. **Levels: 1 2 3 4**