

[IMAGE]

## 4 Tips to Help Raise a Healthy Child

By Editorial Staff

Raising kids to be responsible, independent and yes, healthy adults is as challenging as it's ever been. A short list of complicating factors in the 21st century includes the Internet, social media and mobile technology; sugar-overloaded, processed, nutrient-deficient foods; and too-distracted, too-overloaded lives (parents and kids alike). With those factors alone in mind, let's see if we can develop a simple game plan to help your kids grow up right. We'll keep it simple: 4 Tips for Healthy Kids.

1. *Turn Them Off*: Every parent's No. 1 priority in the Age of Technology should be limiting your children's "screen time" to a healthy amount each day. What's "healthy"? According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, it's essentially no screen time whatsoever (except for video chatting) before age 2. After that, the recommendations are less about time spent and more about the what, when and where of screen time: media-free dining and driving, "shut off" times (e.g., no computer / phone at least one hour before bedtime), media-free locations (e.g., the bedroom), co-viewing of media, and understanding what constitutes healthy vs. unhealthy screen time, both in terms of what kids are viewing and how it can affect them (social media, inappropriate websites, etc.).

2. *Kick Them Out*: Kick your child out of the house every day for at least an hour of physical activity, not to mention sunlight (but don't forget the sunscreen) and fresh air. The couch is no place to live, so don't let your children set up shop there. If you don't have a backyard or immediate access to a playground or other outdoor area, commit to walking with your children after dinner every night for at least 30 minutes. Good for you, good for them.

3. *Show Them How*: The fitness / healthy-eating market has expanded tremendously over the past few decades, but don't be fooled: Children and adults alike are still constantly bombarded with subtle and not-so-subtle messaging that compromises their health and wellness efforts. Processed foods. Sugar-sweetened beverages. Even products labeled "all natural," "multigrain," "sugar-free" or "low fat" that don't come close to telling the whole story when it comes to their nutritional value (or lack thereof), and overall impact on short- and long-term health. As a parent, it's up to you to show your children how to eat right. The most important step: *show yourself how*. Remember, kids learn from their parents, for better or

worse. In fact, sometimes what you're *not* doing can have a greater impact than what you are doing.

4. *Build Them Up*: Social media, comment forums, reality television and more; what's a parent to do when trying to raise a confident, respectful child? Besides limiting their exposure to these types of scenarios (see tip #1 above), it's your job to build them up every day and in every interaction. Every parent is a teacher, so teach your kids why they matter in this world, and that no one can take their worth and self-value away from them unless *they* let it happen.

5. *Keep Them Close*: When was the last time you had a real conversation with your child? When was the last time you walked out of a room and said to yourself, *I really feel like I made a difference*? There are plenty of opportunities for distance and disengagement these days. Keep your kids close by creating moments of interaction and sharing: family dinner every night (or at least on certain set days); movie night; or even just 10 minutes of set time a day with your child (especially if a teen) to let them talk about their hopes, fears and everything in between. Your children want you to stay closer than they've ever admit to you. Your ability to always be there is your ultimate tip to help them grow up healthy.

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