

Tips for a Healthier New Year

Rona Renner, RN

Prevent violence by setting good examples:

Demonstrate and teach displays of affection, attention, approval, how to say "I'm sorry" and how to ask for, give and accept forgiveness. All of these promote love, good will, self-esteem, and reduce likelihood of violence, aggression, and negative, destructive words and behaviors. Set limits for your children by letting them know what's expected, and notice when they meet your expectations. Try to avoid hitting, slapping or spanking. Your children may copy you and think that it is okay to hit other people.

Make sure immunizations are up to date:

Review your child's immunization record with your pediatrician. Make sure your child is current on recommended immunizations.

Provide a tobacco-free environment:

Second-hand tobacco smoke increases ear infections, chest infections and even Sudden Infant Death Syndrome. If you smoke, consider quitting. Remember, your child loves you and will copy you – if you smoke, your children may grow up to be smokers too. Make your home and car smoke-free zones.

Practice "safety on wheels:"

Make sure everyone in the car is buckled up for every ride, with children in the back seat in age-appropriate child safety seats. All bikers, skaters, and skateboarders should wear helmets and other appropriate sports gear.

Do a "childproofing" survey of your home:

A child's-eye view home survey should systematically go from room to room, removing all the "booby traps" that await the curious toddler or preschooler. Think of poisons, small objects, sharp edges, knives and firearms, and places to fall.

Monitor your children's media:

Monitor what your children see and hear on television, in movies, and in music. Talk with your children about "content." Screen out sexually exploitative Web sites, music and video. Be informed of what your children see or hear when visiting friends. If you feel that a movie or TV program is inappropriate, redirect them to more suitable programming.

Pay attention to nutrition:

Nutrition makes a big difference in how kids grow, develop and learn. Good nutrition is a matter of balance. Provide foods from several food groups at each meal. Emphasize foods that are less processed, such as whole grain breads and cereals and fresh fruits and vegetables. Review your child's diet with your pediatrician for suggestions.

Make your children feel loved and important:

Recognize every effort and increment of 'progress' or 'improvement' they make; don't compare siblings; understand your child's behaviors and emotions; recognize 'hidden agendas' like acting up, may be a cry for attention and help; not doing homework may be a sign of distraction or learning problems.

Celebrate every child's individuality and tell them what makes them special. Assure them that they are loved and safe.

(American Academy of Pediatrics, www.aap.org)

