

BUILDING AN ONTARIO MIDDLE YEARS STRATEGY

OPHA’s Response to the Minister of Children and Youth’s Consultations on the Middle Years

Guiding Principles:

- Children and family at the centre
- It takes a village
- Experiences make lasting impacts
- Culture and personal/spiritual identity matter
- Context impacts development
- Children and families have a voice
- Equity of opportunities for everyone

| Goals | Outcomes |
|---|---|
| Kids are Active and Well | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Kids are physically healthy 2. Kids feel mentally well 3. Kids learn and practice habits that support healthy and safe development 4. Kids play and are happy |
| Kids have Caring and Connected Families | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Kids have at least one consistent caring adult in their lives 6. Families are financially stable and secure 7. Families are active and engaged in their children’s learning and development 8. Families are supported to thrive |
| Kids have Positive Relationships | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. Kids form and maintain healthy, close relationships 10. Kids respect others and value diversity 11. Kids have safe interactions at home, at school, online and in their communities |
| Kids are Engaged in Learning | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 12. Kids are gaining the knowledge and skills they need 13. Kids have learning experiences that are relevant to them and address their strengths and needs 14. Kids are curious and love to learn |
| Kids are Valued | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 15. Kids are discovering who they are and who they want to be 16. Kids are proud of their personal and cultural identity 17. Kids can express what matters to them |
| Communities are Supporting Kids and Families | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 18. Families know about and easily access quality resources in their communities 19. Families inform the decisions that affect them 20. Communities foster belonging for kids and families |

Goal:

Kids are Active and Well

OUTCOME #1: Kids are physically healthy

WHAT WE'VE HEARD FROM RESEARCHERS, FAMILIES, AND COMMUNITIES

- During the middle years, children experience a period of rapid physical growth and changes. Kids need physical activity, plenty of quality sleep and good nutrition to support healthy growth and development. However, many kids in this age group are not getting what is needed to support their physical wellbeing.
- Some aspects to supporting kids to be physically healthy include:
 - Children have access to healthier nutritional choices (nutrition programs in all schools)
 - Children have access to quality family health care
 - Children have access to recreation and physical activities such as sports programming that are free / affordable, sustainable, and accessible
 - Families have tools to identify early warning signs of social, behavioural or mental health concerns

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

A. What needs to happen for all kids to achieve this outcome?

Applying a health equity lens is important for Ontario's middle years strategy. The social determinants of health (e.g., income, housing, culture/race, disabilities, and gender) impact the health and wellbeing of children of all ages. In addition, there are opportunities to consider the potential positive or negative impact of the external environment on well-being. For example:

- Increasing access to healthy foods, through policy changes for the school food environment, such as harmonized nutrition guidelines for children; increasing access to healthy foods in all communities especially remote and First Nation schools, collaborative interventions through child care, schools and communities to promote healthy eating and physical activity; reduce access to unhealthy foods and restrict access to promotion and advertising of unhealthy food to children..
- Providing a safe and supportive environment for healthy eating and physical activity in child care, schools and communities.
- Providing an emotionally and physically safe and supportive environment

The Middle years strategy should align more strategically with other ministry initiatives for example the Ministry of Education's Student Wellness Strategy, Ministry of Health's Healthy Kids Strategy/Healthy Kids Community Challenge, Poverty Reduction Strategy/Food Security Strategy, to allow for greater consistency between all government approaches and policies aimed at improving well-being in children in Ontario, and also to encourage sharing of data on indicators, outcomes and other information and resources. Additionally, for children to be active and well, the middle years strategy should address protecting children from harm related to weight stigma, violence and bullying in child care, school and community settings.

For children to be physically healthy they need to have consistent and equitable access to healthy food and beverages and healthy environments at all times to support them in making and accessing healthy choices in all child care, school and government funded community programs. Specifically children require increased access to water and decreased access to SSB; increased access to vegetables and fruit and other healthy food choices at school and in the community. These should be supported by healthy eating guidelines for student nutrition programs, recreation centres and community programs.

Intervention programs such as those being implemented by the Ministry of Health's Healthy Kids Community Challenge are examples of comprehensive cross-cutting community programs that strive to provide more equitable opportunities to improve health and well-being through healthy eating and physical activity in communities.

The Ontario Middle years strategy age target (6 – 12 years) fits well with the target group identified in the Healthy Kids Community Challenge (0-12 years) and connections and lessons learned from this initiative should be considered by MCYS for future programming.

The Healthy Kids Community Challenge involves schools (including curriculum/lesson plans and participatory food literacy activities such as gardening and cooking) to teach children about healthy eating and making healthy food choices, positive role models in schools (teachers, volunteers, peers), afterschool programs and community recreation and sports programs that provide access to healthy food and beverages (e.g. water) and restrict access to unhealthy foods and beverages (e.g. sugar sweetened beverages).

Directing resources to embed health equity, healthy eating and nutrition principles into teacher education and training would be an excellent way to promote well-being in schools. Specifically, evidence shows that when food literacy is embedded into school curriculum it leads to increased consumption of vegetables and fruit. This would help to give them

the best start in life for physical and cognitive development and healthy behaviors that prevent chronic disease. Including more resources to support educator training around weight stigma would help influence the social environment in the school setting to promote health and well-being. Furthermore, taking a health-in-all-policies approach, where health is considered in every aspect of a child's experience in all child care, school, community programs and services and alignment across all Ministries working to support healthy children could serve to make better use of resources.

B. What is the reality today (e.g., challenges and opportunities) for kids, families and communities in Ontario related to this outcome?

Children in some communities, including northern, remote and rural and First Nations communities have limited access to healthy foods, particularly equitably priced fresh fruit and vegetables.

Kids can get food anytime, anywhere – from school in breakfast and snack programs, from foods brought to schools for celebrations or fundraising, vending machines and food services in schools that are non-compliant with nutrition standards. Food is available at fast food outlets located within school zones, local community centres, arenas, and advertising to kids in recreation centres and in the media at large all make it challenging for children to make the healthiest food and beverage choices. Healthy food should be the norm and the easiest choice possible in all child care programs, schools and government funded programs as well as in community recreation programs.

Presently the approach to healthy eating is fragmented – there are different nutrition guidelines/standards for child care, student nutrition programs and schools (PPM 150) that make it challenging to align programs and messages. More harmonization for nutrition guidelines and standards for children are needed.

C. What are some examples of actions or initiatives that do, or could, support this outcome?

OPHA has been involved in several activities that contribute to promoting and supporting student health and well-being. OPHA, in partnership with the Association of Local Public Health Units (alPHA) coordinated an engagement session for public health and health promotion stakeholders on behalf of Ministry of Education to provide feedback on the Phase II Child Care and Early Years Regulations. OPHA houses the health promotion resource centre [Nutrition Resource Centre](#) (NRC), with expertise in healthy eating and nutrition practice, program and policy. OPHA was contracted to refresh the nutrition guidelines for Ontario's Student Nutrition Program. We partnered with our School Nutrition colleagues from the Ontario Society for Nutrition Professionals in Public Health, a constituent society of OPHA and are well-entrenched in school health.

Student nutrition programs can support disadvantaged children and schools with food as well and support food literacy around healthy eating. Curriculum can support food literacy as well as health education.

The NRC houses the [Healthy Eating Manual](#) and the Navigator. The Healthy Eating Manual is an online resource that includes lesson plans and developed for teachers and community leaders who have the opportunity and desire to incorporate healthy eating information into programs they are currently running or planning. The NRC Navigator is a one-stop, hub that houses evidence-based resources to support healthy eating programs, policies and practices. Through the NRC, we directly support teachers and other health intermediaries to implement healthy eating initiatives including, PPM 150 – the school food and beverage regulations. We also provide many other resources including webinars as further examples of this support. In November of this year, we are hosting a knowledge transfer and exchange forum on the topic of mental health and nutrition where issues of weight bias will be addressed.

In addition, NRC is a partner in supporting the Ministry of Health's Healthy Kids Community Challenge along with 3 other health promotion resource centres in Ontario, providing implementation support to the 45 communities who are delivering programs and interventions designed to improve children's health and well-being. The intent is to implement multi-component school and community-based interventions to increase physical activity and healthy eating in children and families. Specific interventions over a 4-year period focus on promoting physical activity, increasing water/reducing SSB intake and increasing vegetable and fruit intake. These interventions are based on evidence for what works best in community and education settings and include a range of health promotion strategies (education, infrastructure changes, policies, etc.) implemented in multiple settings (child care, schools, community/municipal programs) involving children, educators, parents/caregivers, health intermediaries and community members. Some examples include:

- Social marketing campaign - with promotional materials for kids and parents
- Education - about water and SSBs to kids and parents in child care, schools and community at large
- Environment – increased access to water fountains and filling stations, refillable bottles, decreased sales and access to and marketing of sugar sweetened beverages at recreation centres
- Parent/Community engagement - theme-based community events for parents and kids, sports teams
- Parent/caregiver/teacher partnerships - to support implementation at child care, schools, kids programs
- Peer support/student & parent involvement - school-based activities for kids, & group activities for parents

Goal

Kids are Active and Well

OUTCOME #2: Kids feel mentally well

WHAT WE'VE HEARD FROM RESEARCHERS, FAMILIES, AND COMMUNITIES

- Mental wellness is a key component of overall wellbeing. Supporting kids to feel mentally well may include them getting exercise, developing positive relationships, forming a positive sense of self and spirit, and learning coping strategies to deal with stress. Research shows that the middle years is a period when warning signs of mental health concerns may be detected and early interventions could help prevent escalation of more serious issues. However, families may not know where to go when concerns arise, or how to support their children to develop positive emotional regulation and other skills that could help to support positive mental wellness.
- Some aspects to supporting kids to feel mentally well include:
 - Families have the tools to identify early warning signs
 - Children are supported to cope with anxiety and mental wellbeing (e.g. mindfulness exercises)
 - Children are supported to express what they are feeling, and learn self-care strategies
 - Children have access to mental health resources in a timely manor

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

A. What needs to happen for all kids to achieve outcome?

For children to feel well and accepted at school they need to feel good about themselves without social stigma.

As mentioned above, for children to be active and well, the middle years strategy should address protecting children from harm related to weight stigma, violence and bullying in child care, school and community settings. Providing an emotionally and physically safe and supportive environment is essential to this.

Children need positive supports at school and home (e.g. positive parenting, positive role models, supportive teachers; who are awareness of nutrition/healthy weight and mental health issues).

Educators and parents need education and information about the relationship with mental health and wellness, and the importance of good nutrition/healthy eating and physical activity, an understanding of healthy weights and weight stigma and early detection of mental health problems (e.g. eating disorders).

B. What is the reality today (e.g., challenges and opportunities) for kids, families and communities in Ontario related to this outcome?

C. What are some examples of initiatives that do, or could, support this outcome?

Goal Kids are Active and Well

Outcome #3: Kids learn & practice habits that support healthy & safe development

WHAT WE'VE HEARD FROM RESEARCHERS, FAMILIES, AND COMMUNITIES

- Research shows that it is important for children in the middle years to develop an understanding of the factors that contribute to healthy growth and development and begin to take responsibility for their own health, safety and wellbeing. These skills are sometimes referred to as “health literacy” and can be developed through forming and practicing healthy habits and routines. It is also a time for kids to learn about their bodies and to develop a positive sense of their own body image, and develop confidence, self-awareness, and self-efficacy.
- Some ways kids learn and practice health habits include:
 - Families model healthy habits – nutrition, exercise, cooking together, active recreation
 - Limiting exposure to screen time and only allowing for quality screen activity
 - Children experience physical activities that are enjoyable and they can be good at
 - Children learn how to assess risk and develop responsibility
- Children have access to environments that support health and active living habits
- Children have access to healthy nutritional choices

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

A. What needs to happen for all kids to achieve this outcome?

Children need to be supported by positive role models at home and school and supportive environments in their community to practice habits that support their health. Food literacy involves a set of interrelated attributes including food and nutrition knowledge and skills, food and nutrition attitudes, nutrition and cooking self-efficacy, and the impact of social determinants of health and food and other food systems on dietary behaviour. Curriculum is needed to provide the knowledge however children learn best from hands on interactive activities such as gardening or helping to prepare or cook foods.

B. What is the reality today (e.g., challenges and opportunities) for kids, families and communities in Ontario related to this outcome?

Children are being subjected to 4-5 food and beverage ads per hour of TV and most are for unhealthy processed foods. Marketing is preventing too many kids from developing healthy habits that would extend into adulthood.

Cooking from basic ingredients has greatly declined, in part due to increased availability and consumption of processed and convenience food and this may have contributed to decreased transference of traditional and basic cooking skills to children and adolescents from parents. Evidence indicates that involvement in food preparation is associated with better diet quality among young adults, as well as adolescents.

C. What are some examples of initiatives that do, or could, support this outcome?

Health literacy around the importance of healthy behaviours (not to use tobacco or drugs, healthy eating, physical activity, mental health) is included in the Ministry of Education's health and physical activity curriculum for students. Food literacy should include more interactive participatory learning (about food, nutrition, meal preparation, planning, cooking, etc) should be taught in every grade and a mandatory food and nutrition course should be put in place for all high school students to graduate. Food literacy is required for child care providers, caregivers/parents and educators. Food literacy training should be part of the education and training for child care providers, teachers and other educators and health intermediaries.

Goal Kids are Active and Well

Outcome #4: Kids play and are happy

WHAT WE'VE HEARD FROM RESEARCHERS, FAMILIES, AND COMMUNITIES

- Research shows that having opportunities for free, unstructured play is critical to children's healthy development. Children who play outside are more likely to get the recommended amount of exercise and lower risk of being overweight and depression. They also do better in school, have better social skills, feel less isolated, have better self-control and develop skills for dealing with stress. Yet kids are not getting enough time for play. (ParticipACTION 2015).
- We heard that supporting kids to enjoy happy, active lives, do things they like (hobbies), play, access indoor and outdoor recreation /spaces, etc. looks different for all families and communities. Some ways to support this outcome:
 - Supporting kids to play, be active and happy can also include music, dance, walking, biking, cultural activities, and getting outside for unstructured time with families. Sports are great for some, but not for all kids – “Sports

is not a panacea”.

- Challenges like cost, transportation, scheduling, and lack of programs that accommodate kids of all abilities can leave kids out of structured sports and recreational activities.
- Help families to find activities that are free/affordable, sustainable, and accessible

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

A. What needs to happen for all kids to achieve outcome?

B. What is the reality today (e.g., challenges and opportunities) for kids, families and communities in Ontario related to this outcome?

C. What are some examples of initiatives that do, or could, support this outcome?

Goal Kids Have Caring and Connected Families

Outcome #5: Kids have at least one consistent caring adult in their lives

WHAT WE'VE HEARD FROM RESEARCHERS, FAMILIES, AND COMMUNITIES

- Families play a critical role in the positive development of their children's lives. Caregivers who set high expectations for their children, while being supportive and sensitive to their children's needs, can help instill in their children self-efficacy, motivation, social competencies, self-esteem and health promoting behaviour.
- Strong supportive families can be protective factors against risks such as poverty, living in high-risk neighbourhoods, mental health issues.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

A. What needs to happen for all kids to achieve this outcome?

B. What is the reality today (e.g., challenges and opportunities) for kids, families and communities in Ontario related to this outcome?

C. What are some examples of initiatives that do, or could, support this outcome?

Goal Kids Have Caring and Connected Families

Outcome #6: Families are financially stable and secure

WHAT WE'VE HEARD FROM RESEARCHERS, FAMILIES, AND COMMUNITIES

- Many families we interviewed are working multiple jobs, juggling overlapping work and home schedules and trying their best to support their children to thrive. All families told us they want the best for their children. But the reality is that some families in Ontario are not able to provide the basic needs of safe housing, food, clothing and life essentials.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

A. What are the key aspects needed to support this outcome? (What needs to happen for all kids to achieve outcome?)

Having a basic income would help alleviate some financial constraints. OPHA supports the government's basic income pilot with the view that this would be adopted in Ontario. OPHA's support for basic income is informed by overwhelming evidence of the powerful link between income and health. People living with a lower income are at far greater risk of preventable medical conditions across the lifespan, including cancer, diabetes, heart disease, mental illness, and their associated health care costs, compared with those living with higher incomes. Ensuring everyone has an income sufficient to meet basic needs and live with dignity would be one of the most important initiatives the provincial government could pursue to promote health, well-being and equity amongst Ontarians.

In Ontario, the Poverty reduction strategy office is working on a food security strategy and specific actions should be made

to reduce food insecurity, especially in families with children.

*“People in Ontario should have access to and the means to choose and obtain safe, healthy, local and culturally acceptable food. **Healthy diets** can greatly impact health and wellbeing, yet there can be many complex barriers for people in Ontario to access these foods. Approaches taken need to ensure that food is economically and physically accessible, culturally acceptable and sustainably sourced so that long-term **food security** can be achieved for all throughout the province. Economic constraints challenge many households in Ontario from purchasing healthy, culturally acceptable food, while the food environment can provide minimal access to appropriate **healthy food** outlets and food options. Furthermore, **sustainable** production and distribution practices, and land conservation planning need to be considered for long-term access to healthy, **local food** for present and future generations. Improving long-term access to **healthy food** will require a multipronged approach to programs and policies to address the unique needs of individuals, households, and communities throughout the province”*. Ontario Food and Nutrition Strategy <https://sustainontario.com/work/ofns/>

B. What is the reality today (e.g., challenges and opportunities) for kids, families and communities in Ontario related to this outcome?

According to research conducted by Val Tarasuk and PROOF colleagues based on CCHS data (2013, 2014) 17% of children lived in households in Ontario are affected by food insecurity. “Food insecurity is more prevalent among households with children under the age of 18, particularly those headed by single mothers. Exposure to severe food insecurity leaves an indelible mark on children’s wellbeing, manifesting in greater risks for conditions like asthma, depression, and suicidal ideation in adolescence and early adulthood.” <http://proof.utoronto.ca/resources/fact-sheets/#children>

Children in some communities, including northern, remote and rural and First Nations communities have limited access to healthy foods, particularly equitably priced fresh fruit and vegetables. Some schools are supported by the Northern Fruit and Vegetable program and some have Student Nutrition programs but there is no universal student nutrition program in Ontario.

C. What are some examples of initiatives that do, or could, support this outcome?

OPHA has been supporting the Ontario Food and Nutrition Strategy as part of a collaborative initiative with other health, food and agricultural organization. This strategy calls for the implementation of a cross-sector, multi-stakeholder coordinated food and nutrition strategy to ensure healthy food systems are strengthened and maintained in Ontario for the health of present and future generations. Here are some strategies identified in the Ontario food and nutrition strategy:

- Address root cause of food insecurity by supporting policies to improve individual and household income to enable low income residents to afford **healthy food** e.g. basic income guarantee, adequate minimum wage and social service allotment, affordable housing, affordable childcare, seniors care, public transportation, education and training, and employment.
- When setting the rates for social assistance, minimum wage and the Special Diet Allowance, ensure **nutritious** food is accessible to all people in Ontario by using the cost of the Nutritious Food Basket and other locally appropriate costing exercises, in addition to the cost of housing (reported by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation).
- Increase the availability of equitably-priced, safe, healthy, local and culturally appropriate food in childcare, preschools, schools, colleges, universities, long term care facilities, hospitals, recreation centres, workplaces and other public facilities.
- Establish a **universal student nutrition program** in all Ontario public schools and in all First Nations communities.
- Support and ensure accountability of programs that increase physical and economic accessibility of healthy, safe, culturally appropriate food to rural and remote regions of Ontario.
- Support community **food access** and production solutions that promote the **availability** and affordability of fresh, locally or regionally grown food and create opportunities to implement and expand these initiatives (e.g. fresh vegetable and fruit boxes, preparation of traditional food, farmer’s markets, **community food hubs**, multi-cultural community gardens).
- Support community-based social enterprises that increase access to healthy, safe, affordable and culturally appropriate food
- Ensure that food safety, quality and sustainability systems are in place, clearly documented, and that food quality is promoted.
- Conduct research that looks into the effect of subsidizing **nutritious** ingredients, beverages and food.

Ontario Food and Nutrition Strategy, 2017 - <https://sustainontario.com/work/ofns/>

Goal Families are Caring and Connected

Outcome #7: Families are active & engaged in their children’s learning & development

WHAT WE’VE HEARD FROM RESEARCHERS, FAMILIES, AND COMMUNITIES

- Research shows that when families are active and engaged in their children’s lives, children tend to have higher self-worth and social competence, and fewer anti-social behaviours.
- We heard from families some ways they work to achieve this outcome:
 - Being actively engaged in their children’s school, such as knowing who to go to with questions and concerns, keeping up what their kids are learning, and supporting their kids with homework.
 - Having regular family dinners with their families
 - Participating in recreational activities, cultural ceremonies, and outdoor activities with their kids and extended family
 - Fostering open, honest communication, close bonds, yet provide the space kids in this age group need to develop their own sense of autonomy and self-efficacy.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- A. What needs to happen for all kids to achieve outcome?
- B. What is the reality today (e.g., challenges and opportunities) for kids, families and communities in Ontario related to this outcome?
- C. What are some examples of initiatives that do, or could, support this outcome?

Goal Kids Have Caring and Connected Families

Outcome # 8: Families are supported to thrive

WHAT WE’VE HEARD FROM RESEARCHERS, FAMILIES, AND COMMUNITIES

- Families need support to be able to cope with challenges (poverty, mental health, health, special needs for kids, etc.). Support may come in the form of programs and services (childcare, after-school programs, counselling, etc.) but it may also mean strong and reinforcing networks of friends, families and community members.
- Research shows that children who are at-risk but have parents who are socially connected to their neighbourhood and to each other are less likely to experience challenges than those parents who are not well-integrated. It is also important from a child development perspective to help kids feel they can make a difference, and build a sense of self-advocacy, self-confidence and agency.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- A. What are the key aspects needed to support this outcome? (What needs to happen for all kids to achieve outcome?)
- B. What is the reality today (e.g., challenges and opportunities) for kids, families and communities in Ontario related to this outcome?
- C. What are some examples of initiatives that do, or could, support this outcome?

Goal Kids have Positive Relationships

Outcome #9: Kids form and maintain healthy, close relationships

WHAT WE’VE HEARD FROM RESEARCHERS, FAMILIES, AND COMMUNITIES

- Social connectedness plays an important role in positive outcomes for children. During the middle years, children

develop a sense of belonging – a connectedness to their friends, family and community. This is a period when peer groups begin to take on new levels of importance in children’s lives. Kids are beginning to develop close, trusting friendships and as they get older, they develop the foundations of romantic relationships. Studies show that children’s social connectedness is linked to better behaviour, self-esteem and self-confidence, as well as academic achievement.

- Some aspects of children forming and maintaining healthy, close relationships include:
 - Children develop social-emotional skills to make new friends, and be empathetic to all
 - Children participate in activities with peers (clubs, recreation, art. Etc.) at a face to face level
 - Children are provided with opportunities to socialize outside of classrooms
 - Children have access to diverse social activities (through community capacity e.g. schools)

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

A. What are the key aspects needed to support this outcome? (What needs to happen for all kids to achieve outcome?)

See outcome #2 above

B. What is the reality today (e.g., challenges and opportunities) for kids, families and communities in Ontario related to this outcome?

C. What are some examples of initiatives that do, or could, support this outcome?

Goal Kids have Positive Relationships

Outcome # 10: Kids respect others and value diversity

WHAT WE’VE HEARD FROM RESEARCHERS, FAMILIES, AND COMMUNITIES

- During the middle years, kids start to learn to contribute to their external environment, understand social responsibility, and understand the importance of treating others fairly and with respect.
- Some aspects involved in supporting this outcome include:
 - Children are exposed to and learn to value diversity
 - Children are comfortable in one’s self and other's differences
 - Children are able to problem solve and respect other people's opinions
 - Diversity is celebrated
 - Children are culturally responsive towards each other through learning about shared histories

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

A. What are the key aspects needed to support this outcome? (What needs to happen for all kids to achieve outcome?)

See outcome 2 above

B. What is the reality today (e.g., challenges and opportunities) for kids, families and communities in Ontario related to this outcome?

C. What are some examples of initiatives that do, or could, support this outcome?

Goal Kids have Positive Relationships

Outcome #11: Kids have safe interactions at home, school, online and in communities

WHAT WE’VE HEARD FROM RESEARCHERS, FAMILIES, AND COMMUNITIES

- As kids progress through the middle years, they begin to develop independence, want to exercise some autonomy from their families and are increasingly exposed to new external influences. This is a healthy pathway of development. Parents shared their concerns about their children’s experiences with bullies, fears about pre-teens venturing into new environments and interactions with strangers, and the overwhelming, and sometimes scary, influence of social media.
- Some aspects to support kids to have safe interactions include:
 - Kids have positive role models
 - Children receive anti-bullying education, and parents feel equipped to support their children to deal with the effects of bullying on their children

- Children receive leadership training
- Children receive positive messages about body awareness, self-esteem
- Children learn about the risks of social media, and parents have rules in place to reduce risk

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

A. What are the key aspects needed to support this outcome? (What needs to happen for all kids to achieve outcome?)

See outcome #2 above

B. What is the reality today (e.g., challenges and opportunities) for kids, families and communities in Ontario related to this outcome?

C. What are some examples of initiatives that do, or could, support this outcome?

Goal Kids are Engaged in Learning

Outcome# 12: Kids are gaining the knowledge and skills they need

WHAT WE'VE HEARD FROM RESEARCHERS, FAMILIES, AND COMMUNITIES

- In the middle years, kids begin to “learn how to learn”. They find ways to improve learning (practising, learning from mistakes), their attention spans are expanding, and they become aware of their own strengths and weaknesses as learning. Kids enter the formal school environment and progress through curricular activities. However, an outcome for children related to learning is much more than achieving good grades and academic success. And learning is not just done in schools. While academic readiness and achievement is important, so too is children learning about their culture, community, ancestry, which help to shape a child’s own worldview.
- Some aspects for children to gain the knowledge and skills they need:
 - Children access high quality learning opportunities inside and outside of the school context
 - Children achieve success in relation to their individual potential (equitable access)
 - Children learn about relationships, healthy lifestyles, physical activity, how they learn, and make connections between what they learn, their world, and what they hope for the future

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

A. What needs to happen for all kids to achieve outcome?

Children need to be able to distinguish between healthy and non-healthy behaviours, need positive supportive educators, caregivers, parents and role models.

They need hands on relevant and practical education and skills to apply to the real world in order to make healthy choices. For example how to choose healthy foods in a complex nutrition environment – when advertising and marketing is telling them to choose specific foods/beverages, when unhealthy choices are easily accessible in their school, home or community centre, or favoured by their peers caregivers, parents.

Children need educated and informed educators, caregivers, parents and peers to support them in making healthy choices.

Directing resources to embed health equity, healthy eating and nutrition principles into teacher education and training would be an excellent way to promote health and well-being in schools. Specifically, evidence shows that when food literacy is embedded into school curriculum it leads to increased consumption of vegetables and fruit. This would help to give them the best start in life for physical and cognitive development and healthy behaviors that prevent chronic disease. Including more resources to support educator training around weight stigma would help influence the social environment in the school setting to promote health and well-being. Furthermore, taking a health-in-all-policies approach, where health is considered in every aspect of a child’s experience in all child care, school, community programs and services and alignment across all Ministries working to support healthy children could serve to make better use of resources.

B. What is the reality today (e.g., challenges and opportunities) for kids, families and communities in Ontario related to this outcome?

Children learn a lot about relationships and lifestyle choices/behaviours (healthy and not healthy) from media – television, movies, internet, social media and they are exposed to this in their homes and communities.

C. What are some examples of initiatives that do, or could, support this outcome?

As above - health literacy around the importance of healthy behaviours (not to use tobacco or drugs, healthy eating, physical activity, mental health) is included in the Ministry of Education's health and physical activity curriculum for students. Additional supports and training for educators, caregivers, parents. Interactive activities for children and peers.

The Nutrition Resource Centre is well-positioned to provide expertise on many mutual areas of interest that would impact well-being in children in the middle years, specifically around healthy eating and nutrition.

Goal Kids are Engaged in Learning

Outcome # 13: Kids have learning experiences that are relevant to them and address their strengths and needs

WHAT WE'VE HEARD FROM RESEARCHERS, FAMILIES, AND COMMUNITIES

- Research shows that children's success in school is associated with their willingness to engage in tasks – and engagement is influenced by their interests. They need to believe tasks are important and relevant. Kids need to develop confidence and pride in their abilities so they can strive to succeed. For this to happen, "tasks" or learning experiences need to be interesting, relevant, and respond to a range of contexts, cultures, backgrounds, and abilities.
- Some aspects of supporting kids to have learning experiences that are relevant, strengths-based, and meet their needs:
 - Every child is able to learn because they have exposure to flexible learning environments
 - Early identification and support for children with sensory issues / learning issues
 - Children receive appropriate accommodations for multiple exceptionalities and strengthened learning environments and opportunities for social connections
 - Education and community providers partner to bring the community and cultural context into the classroom
 - Every child can see themselves and their families and culture reflected in their learning
 - Children learn about the history of Indigenous peoples in Canada in way that recognizes impact of colonization

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

A. What are the key aspects needed to support this outcome? (What needs to happen for all kids to achieve outcome?)

Children learn about healthy behaviours and nutrition in the home from their parents, caregivers and extended families and at school through the formal curriculum. Children are also influenced by their culture and traditions (e.g. traditional foods), for example Indigenous children and children of immigrants and newcomers to Ontario. As children get older their health and nutrition knowledge and attitudes are influenced by others (teachers, coaches, peers) and more strongly from the media. Food literacy includes attitudes and behaviours around food, nutrition, cooking as well as their own food skills. As children develop beyond the middle years to teens and young adults they need to acquire health and food literacy so that they can make healthy choices in a complex food environment and adopt healthy habits that can help them grow into healthy adults.

B. What is the reality today (e.g., challenges and opportunities) for kids, families and communities in Ontario related to this outcome?

Researchers conducting a study of food literacy among at-risk youth, young pregnant women and young parents in Ontario found a broad range of food skills were expressed and practiced by study participants. Youth are motivated to learn food literacy skills because of:

- cost – when they realize they cannot afford to eat out and buy pre-prepared meals on a limited income;
- taste – when they become bored with the lack of variety among their regular processed food choices;
- personal health – when they link a steady diet of processed foods (especially those high in fat and sugar) with weight gain, risk during pregnancy, lethargy, onset of diabetes or other conditions;
- child health – when new parents realize a sense of responsibility for their child's welfare and fear that undernourishment may be perceived as negligence;
- feeling independent and in control, often in opposition to their own upbringing;
- the pleasure of creativity and cooking for and with others, when the opportunity arises.

Desjardins, E. and Azevedo, E. (2013) "Making Something out of Nothing": Food Literacy among Youth, Young pregnant women and young parents who are at Risk for Poor Health. A locally Driven Collaborative Project of Public Health Ontario. Available at: <http://www.osnpnh.on.ca/resources/index.php>

C. What are some examples of initiatives that do, or could, support this outcome?

Here is what we heard about food literacy programs working with newcomers.

- Interactive cooking classes work better than cooking demonstrations.
- Provide the opportunity for peer-to-peer learning by choosing program leaders that can act as role models and

mentors. It is also useful to make participants leaders and rotating every week.

- Use resources and recipes that are culturally appropriate and relate to their cooking culture. Avoid translating Canadian resources, because they may not be relatable to their culture.
- Community gardens work well since they teach participants about where the food comes from.
- Reinforce the nutrition message from the education component throughout the whole session.
- Short education sessions and games work well for programs with children.
- Cooking sessions with children require small groups with facilitators for each group to monitor.

Here is what we heard about food literacy programs working with Aboriginal groups:

- Include indigenous foods. This is especially important for food skill programming aimed at children. Parents want to use indigenous foods at home but often do not know how. Children bring these teachings home.
- Keep programming as hands on as possible and avoid sessions that are only lecture/education style. If education is important to the program, incorporate it into the meal time discussion.
- Involve elders in the community to teach part of the program.

For reports visit NRC website: <http://opha.on.ca/Nutrition-Resource-Centre/What-We-Do/NRC-Resources.aspx>

Goal Kids are Engaged in Learning

Outcome #14: Kids are curious and love to learn

WHAT WE'VE HEARD FROM RESEARCHERS, FAMILIES, AND COMMUNITIES

- In the middle years, children develop dispositions for learning, including curiosity, creativity, imagination, cooperation, confidence, and enthusiasm. At this age, especially, kids should be happy to go to school and feel positive about learning. A part of this love of learning is relational (families, extended family, teachers, elders, community members). Research shows that children who have positive relationships with teachers are more likely to be engaged in school work and have higher math and literacy skills. Strong connections with school result in better academic, social and mental health outcomes.
- Some aspects of supporting kids to be curious and love to learn:
 - Families, schools and communities all have a role to play in motivating kids and instilling a love of learning
 - Learning takes place in all environments, everyday
 - Recognize different styles for different kids, and help kids to set realistic goals, meet their own potential to feel happy and confident about their achievements
 - Children have access to a network that fosters a love of learning (teachers, family, etc.)
 - Children have positive, meaningful educational experiences
 - Children see school as a place they want to be and they belong

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- A. What are the key aspects needed to support this outcome? (What needs to happen for all kids to achieve outcome?)
- B. What is the reality today (e.g., challenges and opportunities) for kids, families and communities in Ontario related to this outcome?
- C. What are some examples of initiatives that do, or could, support this outcome?

Goal Kids are Valued

Outcome #15: Kids are discovering who they are and who they want to be

WHAT WE'VE HEARD FROM RESEARCHERS, FAMILIES, AND COMMUNITIES

- Over the course of the middle years, children's concept of their self develops dramatically and they begin to develop more complex images of who they are. As they age, they begin to examine themselves inwardly and more abstractly and have a growing sense of themselves as an autonomous individual. Kids begin to deepen their understanding of what they enjoy to do, what they are good at, and what motivates them. Experts say this is an important time to help kids broaden their identity horizons by helping them to imagine and explore a wide variety of potential future identities (works, school, sports, music, etc.). During the middle years, children also solidify their conceptualizations of gender, as well as their own gender identity.
- Some aspects to help kids discover who they are and who they want to be:
 - Children know they have potential and have the possibility to achieve it

- Children feel safe and supported in exploring their identity
- Children have the support to navigate and start to identify who they are, like, dislike, place in family
- Children have a strong set of values – are supported to develop these values and have opportunities to express them

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

A. What are the key aspects needed to support this outcome? (What needs to happen for all kids to achieve outcome?)

B. What is the reality today (e.g., challenges and opportunities) for kids, families and communities in Ontario related to this outcome?

C. What are some examples of initiatives that do, or could, support this outcome?

Goal Kids are Valued

Outcome #16: Kids are proud of their personal and cultural identity

WHAT WE'VE HEARD FROM RESEARCHERS, FAMILIES, AND COMMUNITIES

- Self-identity formation is a critical component of middle years child development, as they begin to explore and experiment with the development of their identity. Research shows that culture helps kids make sense of the world, find their sense of purpose, and connect with their family, extended family and community. Kids need to feel they are safe, encouraged and supported in exploring and expressing their culture, language, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, and other ways of expressing who they are as an individual.
- Some aspects of supporting kids to feel proud of their personal and cultural identity:
 - Children are connected to their cultural heritage
 - Children are encouraged to speak their mother tongue and maintain pride for their culture
 - Children have the opportunity to network with diversity people
 - Diversity is celebrated in schools, peer groups, at home, in community
 - Children are culturally responsive towards each other through learning about shared histories

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

A. What are the key aspects needed to support this outcome? (What needs to happen for all kids to achieve outcome?)

See # 13 above

B. What is the reality today (e.g., challenges and opportunities) for kids, families and communities in Ontario related to this outcome?

C. What are some examples of initiatives that do, or could, support this outcome?

Goal Kids are Valued

Outcome #17: Kids can express what matters to them

WHAT WE'VE HEARD FROM RESEARCHERS, FAMILIES, AND COMMUNITIES

- Kids have values, opinions, and feelings about issues in the world around, and how they want to be in the world. Whether it be the clothes they want to wear, their opinions on a subject, or how they want to express their gender identity, kids need support to help them feel safe and supported in expressing what matters to them.
- Some aspects to help kids achieve this outcome:
 - Children have a voice in decisions that impact them
 - Children feel comfortable expressing themselves
 - Children have a strong sense of civic engagement in community and school
 - Children feel they have a voice in their families and their community
 - Children have opportunities to volunteer and understand (civic) concepts at an earlier age

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

A. What are the key aspects needed to support this outcome? (What needs to happen for all kids to achieve outcome?)

B. What is the reality today (e.g., challenges and opportunities) for kids, families and communities in Ontario related to this outcome?

C. What are some examples of initiatives that do, or could, support this outcome?

Goal **Communities are Supporting Kids and Families**

Outcome #18: Families know about & easily access quality resources in their communities

WHAT WE'VE HEARD FROM RESEARCHERS, FAMILIES, AND COMMUNITIES

- In talking with families in Ontario, we often heard about challenges finding information when they need it. The internet is overwhelming, local services aren't easy to find, they get referred from one service to another, and when they do find relevant programs or services, there are waitlists, or they are not able to access the services they need due to cost, location, lack of transportation, or the kids don't meet the requirements. While programs and services may be out there for families and kids, it feels like a maze and there doesn't seem to be anyone helping them to navigate. We also heard concerns about the lack of kid-friendly spaces for when the kids outgrow the parkette, and to provide quality, age-appropriate opportunities for play and recreation that helps them build skills and have fun.
- Some aspects we heard about helping to achieve this outcome:
 - Children and families are able to access seamless referrals between programs and services to meet their needs
 - Children have access to safe spaces (built environment) that provide quality opportunity for play and recreation
 - Open, community, accessible inclusive hubs (maybe school based)
 - Children and families can access services outside of school hours
 - Community partners wrap around families, "talk" to each other, no wrong door
 - Families have access to diverse services, relevant to all age groups, cultural diversity and needs

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

A. What are the key aspects needed to support this outcome? (What needs to happen for all kids to achieve outcome?)

B. What is the reality today (e.g., challenges and opportunities) for kids, families and communities in Ontario related to this outcome?

C. What are some examples of initiatives that do, or could, support this outcome?

The Nutrition Resource Center does not provide services to parents or consumers directly but support health promotion and healthy eating professionals and partners in a variety of settings (e.g. community and public health, family health teams, and others) to implement programs and policies to improve the eating behaviours of Ontarians and the food environment in Ontario. Our dynamic team of registered dietitians and public health professionals at the Nutrition Resource Centre (NRC) is available to provide customized consulting to organizations, governments, community groups, collaborations and more.

To access consulting services <http://opha.on.ca/Nutrition-Resource-Centre/What-We-Do/Consultations.aspx>

Goal **Communities are Supporting Kids and Families**

Outcome #19: Families inform the decisions that affect them

WHAT WE'VE HEARD FROM RESEARCHERS, FAMILIES, AND COMMUNITIES

- We heard families often feel disconnected from the institutions that are in place to support them and their kids, and they are not as engaged in their community as they think they should be. They feel they have no voice and are not empowered to be involved. Opportunities to for families and children to meaningfully engage in their communities can have a lasting impact.
- Some aspects to helping families play a role in information the decisions that affect them:
 - Creating opportunities for children and families facing barriers to volunteer, take leadership roles and create solutions to challenges to their communities
 - Talk to kids about the importance of being actively involved in the decisions that affect them and empower them to have a voice, take a stand and get involved in their schools, neighbourhoods and community.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

A. What are the key aspects needed to support this outcome? (What needs to happen for all kids to achieve outcome?)

B. What is the reality today (e.g., challenges and opportunities) for kids, families and communities in Ontario related to this outcome?

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| C. What are some examples of initiatives that do, or could, support this outcome? |

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| Goal | Communities are Supporting Kids and Families |
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| Outcome #20: Communities foster belonging for kids and families |
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| WHAT WE'VE HEARD FROM RESEARCHERS, FAMILIES, AND COMMUNITIES |
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- Activities such as sports, arts, cultural events, volunteer work, environmental actions and community programs can make a positive difference in children's life. Participation in such activities is linked to positive friendships, higher self-esteem, increased motivation to try new things, pro-social behaviour, better mental health. However, not all families and children feel welcome to participate in these activities.
- Some of the aspects we heard to achieve this goal:
 - A policy for anti-oppressive training in all service delivery
 - Create culturally safe and inclusive spaces for children (ethno cultural, gender, Indigenous, faith based, various abilities)
 - Children have access and engagement to arts and cultural programs
 - Children develop positive relationships with police

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| QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION |
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| A. What are the key aspects needed to support this outcome? (What needs to happen for all kids to achieve outcome?) |
| B. What is the reality today (e.g., challenges and opportunities) for kids, families and communities in Ontario related to this outcome? |
| C. What are some examples of initiatives that do, or could, support this outcome? |