



SOCIAL INFLUENCES AND ENVIRONMENTS

Children's earliest relationships and experiences contribute significantly to their physical and emotional development, and result in experiences that either impede or positively impact their growth (Casas, 2001).

Social Influences and Eating Routines

Studies consistently show a nutritional benefit of family meals that typically include an increased consumption of vegetables, fruit, and calcium-rich foods or dairy, and a decreased consumption of pop. A lower risk for becoming overweight is associated with increased frequency of family meals, and eating together as a family also seems to offer protection from eating disorders (Dietitians of Canada, 2007).

- 82% of students in Grades 4 and 5 reported eating at least one meal with their parent or guardian on the previous day. The most frequent meal eaten with parents or guardians was dinner (77%).
- 63% of students in Grades 4 and 5 reported eating lunch with friends.

Social Influences and Physical Activity

Parents can work with their children to encourage healthy behaviours by being active role models themselves. Usually, active parents will have active kids. It's important to start physical activity early as inactive kids may become inactive adults (Canada's Physical Activity Guide, 2002).

- 91% of students in Grades 4 and 5 reported that their parent or guardian encouraged them to be physically active.
- 33% of parents of students in Kindergarten to Grade 5 reported that their child participated in school-based sports clubs; whereas others indicated no participation (45%), or that such activities were not available (20%).
- 59% of parents of students in Kindergarten to Grade 5 reported that their child participated in school-based physical activities (e.g. noon hour and recess organized games or activities); whereas others indicated no participation (27%), or that such activities were not available (12%).
- 46% of parents of students in Kindergarten to Grade 5 characterized their own level of physical activity as "inactive".
- A greater percentage of physically active students in Grades 4 and 5 reported having "active" parents.

Social Influences and Exposure to Tobacco

The health effects of second-hand smoke on children are much worse than on adults, because their lungs are still growing and their immune systems are still developing. Children breathe more quickly and take in more harmful chemicals for their size than adults do. Many parents don't realize that second-hand smoke may have harmful effects on their child's behaviour and ability to think things through (cognition). Recently, studies have shown that children who were exposed to tobacco smoke scored lower on tests than children who were not (Health Canada: Make Your Home and Car Smoke-Free, 2006).

- 84% of students in Grades 4 and 5 reported that smoking is not allowed in their home.
- 79% of students in Grades 4 and 5 indicated that smoking is not allowed in the family vehicle (e.g. car, van, etc.).
- Although the majority of students in Grades 4 and 5 identified non-smoking rules for their homes and family vehicles, 30% reported living with people who smoke or use tobacco. Research has found that children of smokers were almost twice as likely to smoke as children with parents who never smoked (Health Canada, 2007).

Social Influences and School Connectedness

A sense of "connection" to the school can support students in making healthy choices. Students who feel an attachment to their school community, and who consider their teachers to be supportive, are less likely to engage in unhealthy or risky behaviours (NB Student Wellness Report, 2007).

Students in Grades 4 and 5 rated their school connectedness as follows:	Percentage of Students Reporting	
	A lot like me	A little like me or not like me
I feel close to people at my school	45	55
I feel I am part of my school	64	36
I am happy to be at my school	61	39
I feel that teachers at my school treat me fairly	68	32
I feel safe in my school	72	28

The New Brunswick Provincial Student Wellness Fact Sheets are available at www.unbf.ca/education/herg. Twenty-three elementary schools, (a representative NB sample) participated in the 2007-2008 New Brunswick Elementary Student Wellness Survey which included:

- Student wellness survey (Grades 4 and 5)
- Direct physical measures (Grades 1, 3 and 5)
- Physical activity monitoring (Grade 5)
- Home wellness survey (Parents of Kindergarten to Grade 5 students)