

Being a MEND-Friendly organisation



Help tackle childhood obesity.

Sports, activity-based and community organisations get kids active. Being active is particularly important for children who are overweight or obese. MEND-Friendly organisations support overweight and obese children to enjoy being healthy and active. Being MEND-Friendly provides opportunities to introduce more children to your programmes or facilities, increase participation and promote lifelong interest and enjoyment in your activities.

Helping children and young people to take part in regular activities that they enjoy (e.g. dancing, sports, swimming) is recommended to help prevent and treat obesity. (NICE, 2006)

Why provide extra support?

Some overweight and obese children are fit and excel in sports, but here are some reasons why others might be reluctant to get involved in organised activities.

- Thinking they are not sporty and won't fit in.
- Fear of failure.
- Fear of being embarrassed or ridiculed.
- Not being very fit or having good skills.
- Feeling greater physical discomfort than other children such as heat intolerance, excess sweating, breathlessness, musculo-skeletal discomfort or skin chaffing.
- Being self-conscious about their weight or body size.

With over 28,000 UK families participating in MEND Programmes by 2010, this is an exciting opportunity to get more children involved in your activities, programmes or services.

What is MEND?

MEND stands for Mind, Exercise, Nutrition...Do it!. MEND provides healthy lifestyle programmes to prevent and treat childhood obesity and help families learn how to be fitter, healthier and happier. The MEND Programme for 7-13 year olds is a fun, free after-school 10 week course for families of children above a healthy weight. The Programme includes nutrition, behaviour change and twice weekly exercise sessions, specifically designed for overweight children. The long term benefits of the Programme include reduced BMI and waist circumference and increased fitness and self-esteem.

After completing MEND programmes, families are motivated to stay healthy and active but may have little experience in joining sport clubs, participating in community activities or using leisure facilities.

What is a MEND-Friendly organisation?

MEND-Friendly organisations are those which encourage MEND families to participate in their programmes or to use their facilities. They create positive, healthy and enjoyable physical activity experiences to address the specific needs of overweight and obese children. The following 10 steps can help your organisation be more Mend-Friendly.

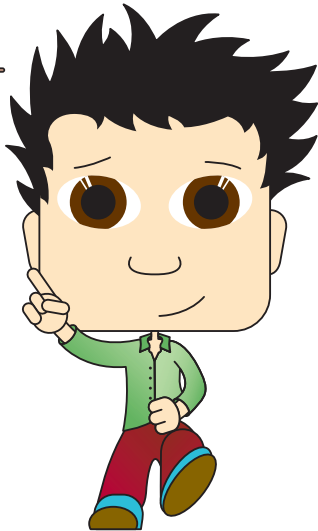
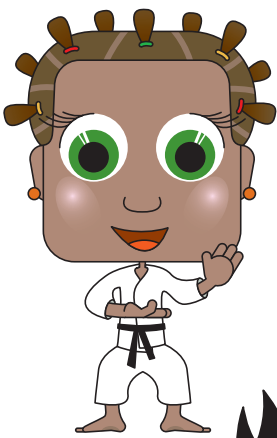
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10 Steps to be a MEND-Friendly organisation

Here are some simple ways that you can become a MEND-Friendly organisation and encourage children who have completed the MEND Programme to get involved in and enjoy your facilities and activities.

1. Be a friendly face

Starting a new sport or activity can be very intimidating, especially if you don't think you are a 'sporty-type'. Nominate a MEND-Friendly contact person from your organisation to help MEND families get started. Talk to your local MEND Programme Manager about opportunities to distribute information leaflets or to meet the MEND families (e.g. at MEND reunions or exercise sessions).



2. Offer taster sessions and 'come and try' days

Encourage families to test out if they like what you have to offer with fun and enjoyable taster sessions or 'come and try' days. This might involve linking with MEND activities (e.g. delivering a taster session at a reunion or at a post-Programme exercise session) or a structured 'come and try' day at your facility.

3. Reduce barriers

Many overweight children come from disadvantaged backgrounds. Cost and transport may be barriers to participation. Consider offering free or subsidised passes, discounting introductory periods or waiving joining fees. Provide public transport routes or link up families who can share journeys. Ask families what will help them the most.

4. Set up a buddy system

Joining a new group can be daunting so provide MEND children with a buddy to help them feel comfortable, make friends and find out where to go and what to do. Parents and carers can also feel intimidated so they may benefit from a 'buddy' too.

5. Redefine success

Success in physical activity is often associated with being the fastest, strongest or being the winner. Whilst this type of success may motivate some children, it makes most children a 'loser' most of the time. Consider ways to make all children who participate in physical activity feel successful by praising and rewarding participation, being a team player or 'giving it a go'.

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6. Get MEND-Friendly MOVES

Well-designed programmes for children accommodate a range of abilities. To provide activities that meet the needs of children above a healthy weight incorporate these MEND-Friendly MOVES into your programmes

Movement – MEND children need to move. Provide opportunities to make their heart beat faster and get a bit flushed and sweaty. Don't push the children to the point of exhaustion which may mean they don't enjoy the experience. Provide rest intervals where children can focus on activities such as skill building.

The STEP Model - Activity for all abilities

Space: using zones in a playing area to give players more space and time.

Task: breaking down a more complex skill into smaller components to make it easier.

Equipment: adapting equipment to make an activity easier or harder e.g. using a smaller ball for throwing and catching to make it harder.

People: changing rules relating to what players/ participants have to do.

British Heart Foundation, (2007)

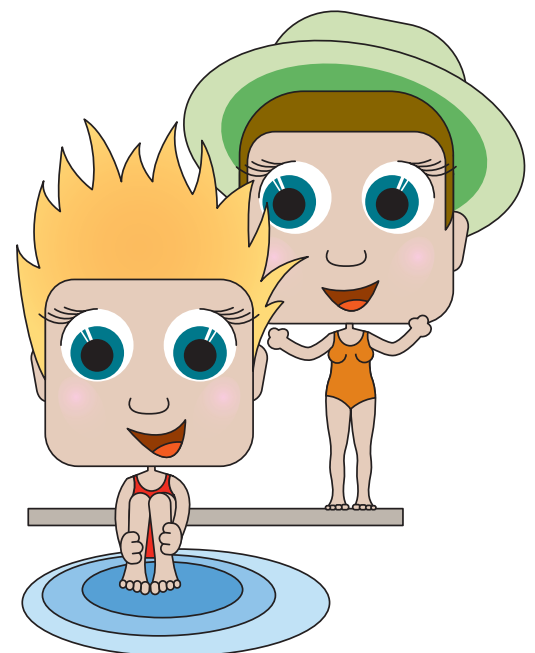
Options – Provide a range of options for children of different skill and fitness levels. (Refer to the STEP Model). Very overweight children should be provided with alternatives to activities which are high impact, explosive or require lifting their own body weight.

Variety – Teach a wide variety of skills and provide a range of experiences to promote lifelong enjoyment of physical activity. Avoid stereotype roles such as always putting overweight children in goals or umpiring positions. Get them involved!

Enjoyable – Make it fun and friendly. Create a positive and accepting social environment where everyone feels they fit in and can make friends. Always stress the positive - 'be healthy', 'get active', 'feel better' and 'enjoy being active'. (Department of Health, UK, 2007)

Successful – Success means participation and personal achievements such as learning a new skill or 'doing better than last time'. It also means avoiding failure situations where children may feel distressed, uncomfortable or embarrassed. For example, avoid children choosing team mates; manage selection of practice partners (e.g. use a buddy) or asking children with low skills to demonstrate in front of peers.

Structure activities to ensure children who are less fit or skilled do not repeatedly come last or that their differences are not highlighted (e.g. everyone else watching and waiting for them to finish a race). For competitive based sports, use grading systems that enable children of similar ability to play against each other. This may include grouped ages or ability levels.



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7. Be weight sensitive

Try to avoid situations or activities which may cause children to be self-conscious about their weight. For example, ensure that equipment (e.g. hoops, bibs) and uniforms are suitable for a wide variety of shapes and sizes; provide private showering and changing options; avoid potentially embarrassing situations such as skins (tops-off) versus shirts or partner work involving lifting, use of others body weight or uncomfortable contact (e.g. use shoulder, arm or hand holds rather than waist). Avoid weighing MEND children and switch the focus to fun and health.

8. Create a healthy environment

Being MEND-Friendly means supporting healthy eating too. Promote water as the drink of choice and encourage all children to bring water bottles. Install a water bottle filling station. Avoid selling or supplying high sugar drinks such as sports drinks, fizzy drinks, fruit juices and fruit drinks. Promote healthy food choices that are consistent with the standards set by National Healthy Schools Programme and the School Food Trust.

9. A whole of organisation approach

Educate organisers, leaders, coaches, staff and volunteers about being MEND-Friendly and meeting the needs of MEND families to ensure children's experiences can be consistently positive and welcoming.

10. Be a supporter

As MEND children may be trying out activities for the first time, their first choice may not work out as planned. If they stop attending, follow up to find out why. You may be able to overcome issues that discourage them from attending your programme or facility. If the activity does not suit them, then you can be a supporter by encouraging them to try something new. Avoid terms like 'dropping out' and 'giving up'. Ask them what they enjoyed or didn't enjoy to help them choose an activity that might suit them better.

How do we get involved?

You can start making MEND-Friendly changes today! To find out more about the MEND Programme visit at www.mendprogramme.org. If you would like to register interest in linking with your local MEND Programme Manager or offering regional or national benefits to MEND families please email sustainableoutcomes@mendprogramme.org.

Useful websites

www.mendprogramme.org
www.healthyschools.gov.uk

www.weightconcern.org.uk
www.bhfactive.org.uk/young-people

Key references

- Department of Health. Obesity guidance for healthy school coordinators and their partners, January 2007
- British Heart Foundation Physical Activity Booklet A, Healthy Schools. Healthy living and learning, British Heart Foundation and Crown 2007 www.healthyschools.gov.uk/Theme-Physical-Activity.aspx
- Sacher P.M, Chadwick P, Kolotourou M, Cole TJ, Lawson MS, Singhal A. The MEND Trial: Sustained Improvements on Health Outcomes in Obese Children at One Year. *Obesity*, 2007;15:A92
- National Collaborating Centre for Primary Care & The Centre for Public Health Excellence: Obesity guidance on the prevention, identification, assessment and management of overweight and obesity in adults and children, National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence, December, 2006