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Play is Powerful Promoter of Family Health and Well-Being

Princeton, January 2011 In today's goal-oriented society, the notion of play can seem a frivolous pursuit for those past primary school age. Physical activity is often perceived as athletics, exercise or "working out." But, experts agree, play can and should be embraced by family members of all ages.

"Overscheduled, stressed, etc., families can become so programmed to think in terms of achievements like earning more money, making a select soccer or swim team, getting good grades," said Paul Zeger, Princeton Family YMCA Youth and Family Director. "Instead of embracing play as a vital part of family life, it is sometimes viewed as a non-productive "waste" of time. But nothing could be further from the truth."

Zeger says families can develop stronger bonds when they share common experiences. Physical activity is a positive experience that families can share as they improve their overall health. Kids and parents who play in a physically active way are healthier and happier. Studies suggest playing, just for the sake of movement and enjoyment and interaction, boosts self-esteem, builds healthy relationships and contributes to a physical health and well-being.

In conjunction with *Healthy Family Home*, the Princeton Family YMCA offers helpful tips to make play part of every day and an important component of healthy families.

First, grown ups must embrace the health and well-being benefits of play, which include increased energy levels; improved sleep patterns; better concentration at work or school; family connectedness; improved self-esteem, and stronger, healthier bodies.

"Play is like fruits and vegetables, an everyday necessity, not a candy or ice cream treat for every once in awhile," said Kevin Walsh, Princeton Family YMCA Senior Program Director. "Families who recognize the power of play will, in fact, improve in all of those other areas of achievement."

How can busy families put more play in their days?

- Spend at least 20 minutes doing something physically active as a family, ideally outdoors. Play fetch with the dog, a game of tag before dinner, play in the leaves or build a snowman before starting homework, play "chase" in the house, play "horse" with little ones. Take a family bike ride to the bank or post office.
- Schedule family recess time by putting play on the weekly schedule, just like soccer games and piano practice. Block out time for a trip to the park playground or a family trip to the pool. Shoot hoops, jump rope, play hopscotch in the driveway.
- Count each effort no matter how large or small. Take quick breaks in-between chores, meal preparation, and homework to dance or run around the house. Create a play jar allowing each family member to put in desired fun activities for weekends or other days off. Turn chore time into play time. Crank up the stereo for a Saturday clean the house party.
- Go to your local YMCA for open gym and swim family time. Use the available equipments like balls, jump ropes, and hula hoops to create your own obstacle courses in the gym or on the field.

YMCA of the USA and Eli Lilly and Company have partnered to create Healthy Family Home to leverage two of the most powerful forces in health today – the family home and the proven impact of small, sustained changes. Healthy Family Home provides tools and support for families who are ready to take a positive step in living a healthier, happier life. For more information and free resources for families visit www.healthyfamilyhome.org or contact the Princeton Family YMCA at 609-497-9622.

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The Princeton Family YMCA is a charitable, cause-driven organization dedicated to youth development, healthy living and social responsibility. For more information about YMCA programs visit princetonymca.org or call 609-497-9622