What are your neighbors saying about raising healthy kids in the south side of Columbus?

Results from focus groups with parents and grandparents of preschoolers living in south side neighborhoods (43205, 43206, and 43207).

This booklet contains ideas from south side parents and grandparents in their own words.

Parents and grandparents are cooking with their kids

They set examples: Take your kids in the kitchen when they get a certain age and start showing them how to cook and do little small things. I believe it’s all in the teaching process, because children live what they learn.

They make cooking fun and safe: They’ll actually enjoy it more and actually think that it might be good. They’re actually willing to try it more. The only thing is, you got to keep sharp knives away from kids. They do have knives that they make especially for kids.

They let their kids help: Well, my 2 year old likes to mix. He loves if you give him a bowl and you sit there with him and you let him mix the eggs or something, he loves it. I think he’ll be eating it more because he thinks “I cooked it, I helped cook it”.

Parents and grandparents encourage their families to eat meals together

They use mealtime to help kids eat better: If you’re not there, nobody’s there to help kids pick out what they’re going to eat and what they can’t eat.

They recognize that family mealtimes are a good time to communicate: Shut the TV off. Let them sit there and eat and talk, you know, together, and you’ll find out a lot of things about your kids. You’ll be amazed. Parents find out a lot about the kids and then they encourage them to eat, too.
Encouraging Young Children to Eat Healthy Foods

Parents and grandparents try to set a good example when eating with their kids

They show kids what they like to eat: Lead by example. Whatever you eat, those kids going to follow right behind what you eating. If I got lettuce and a lettuce tomato salad and I put a little eggs in it to make it taste a little better, you know, they going to eat what you eat, you know?

So whatever you put on your plate, they going to follow you and see how they like it and stuff. …They have like yogurt, blueberries and stuff like that. That’s healthy for them, you know? It just makes you full.

They avoid unhealthy habits: And then kids is just like grown people too. You can cook healthy foods, but if a kid sees you dashing some more salt, in the long run they are going to have high blood pressure, cholesterol, and everything else that their body can’t throw off.

Parents and grandparents offer water when their children are thirsty

They make drinking water fun: My son didn’t like water for the longest time, and I don’t know what it was, but I put ice cubes in his cup, and he’ll love the sound. And when water is ice cold both my kids, who are going on a year and half and two, just love water and they will suck it down. I just thought it was the simplest thing and for some reason they love that stupid sound of ice, and they’ll suck it down now.

They use containers that kids like for water: I think my son likes the water bottles you buy at the store and likes the grown up ones. And then he’ll see his dad drinking a whole bottle and then he’ll be like “let me get some” and he will imitate his dad and what not. But he’s started drinking water out of bottles. It’s really the only way he’ll drink it.

Parents and grandparents encourage children to keep trying new foods

They make new foods interesting: Let the kids look at the pictures, just very colorful and stuff, you know, and you ask them, what do you like to eat? Now my grandkids like broccoli. They love broccoli. If I put a little cheese on it and stuff, you know? They even eat it without cheese. And cauliflower, they love cauliflower. So if you have these colorful pictures, make them look at it and start reading.

Once you put something on the table and let them try it, they might not like it for the first time, but just keep on. Later on just keep on pushing it on them if they turn it down, but eventually they will start eating it.
Encouraging Young Children to Eat Healthy Foods

Parents and grandparents find creative ways to get kids to eat better

They add vegetables to other foods: Well, I spruce up chicken noodle soup by pureeing some of the other vegetables and just kind of folding them in and adding a little bit more of the noodles and stuff. It’s working pretty good. When you just kind of camouflage the veggies for children that don’t eat veggies and mix them in something they really like, they’ll usually eat it.

I’m just saying, suppose you see some peas on a plate, and think “ew”, but if it’s peas in, say, like tuna casserole, then kids might try them.

I do have quite a few recipes that hide the vegetables in there like in mashed potatoes. I can put some carrots in there and they’re still getting what they need. You learn to kind of cook to trick them a little bit sometimes.

They tell kids the benefits of certain foods: When a kid eats food, you got to tell him what it will do for his body. Just like most everybody says eat carrots, it’s good for your eyes. If you get the kid interested in it, tell him what’s going to be good for him on the inside. And when you eat greens, you got to know what greens do for you, or tomatoes, or anything you eat.

They know that kids like to eat foods that look good: My mom used to make something called “ants on a log”. You take you some celery, put peanut butter on it, take you some raisins to put on there, and my mom used to do that, because I never ate celery, didn’t like it plain, …ants on the log! And then, you know, I ate it and stuff and we had fun. That’s what I will do with my kids, you know?

Kids like colors. We chip up a little green onions and stuff. Anything. Kids like colors. They’ll go for it. There might be a seasoning that they will want to put on it. Some type of seasoning to sprinkle on the top.

Parents and grandparents try to provide kid-size portions

They try to be careful about portion sizes:

- The portion of a meat for an adult and for children is the size of the palm of your hand. That’s what it’s supposed to be. It really helps.
- If you have a 3-section plate, the bigger half is supposed to be for the fruit and vegetables.
- We don’t buy the big plates. We use small plates.
Parents and grandparents try to cook in healthy ways for their kids

They plan and cook meals ahead of time: Get the menus. I had a calendar this side of the kitchen and every day off, I pre-cooked the foods. You pre-cook them about 80% and then put them in containers, and then I didn’t have the problems anymore.

If you take the day off and you prepare at least 3 or 4 days of meals, not the whole 7 days, you’ll find that you will have more “me time” to do some other things with.

Delegate a meal plan every day and stick to it.

They cut down on salt: If you want to season your food, you season it like, I’ll use, like, on my steak or stuff I don’t use no salt or pepper. I’ll season it with different seasonings.

Yeah, instead of getting them a bag of potato chips out, cut up your carrots, your broccoli and all that stuff.

And there’s sodium in a lot of foods. There’s been disease links to it. I do pay very good attention to stuff like that because I’m pre-diabetic, I’m pre-high blood pressure and all that stuff, so I got to watch that and the butter, the fat, everything. It’s got to be cut out of every meal, especially if you’re trying to make yourself better, that’s how you’re going to make your child better.

Parents bake some foods instead of frying:
I don’t like fried, so I basically bake foods and it takes less time when you bake though. You ain’t got to sit over the stove, turn over some chicken. It is a lot easier. You thaw some chicken, put it on the little grill in the oven and you put your little vegetables with it.

They remove extra fat from some foods: Just like with meats, most people don’t realize is that if you seal the meat a little bit, you can add flavor to it. But people think that frying foods in oil makes it, makes it taste good, but I learned that by baking something, it tastes just as good, but drains most of the fat off. Just like people think frying bacon drains most of the fat off, but you can actually bake bacon, while you’re baking it most of the fat drains off.
Parents and grandparents find ways to eat healthy foods on a tight budget

They buy frozen fruits and vegetables: Whether you get food stamps, little WIC coupons or whatever, it’s expensive to buy fresh fruits and vegetables, and the stuff goes quick.

I started buying some things frozen, like, the frozen strawberries and pineapples. They have just about everything. They even have frozen melon and stuff now, so, that’s what I started eating.

They buy in bulk with other families: I heard somebody say that some foods are expensive, like oranges as an example. But even if you get the food stamps or coupons, if you have 2 or 3 people in your family, you can save money. Two of my sisters and I used to go in and buy by bulk and we could get the cheapest price.

They grow vegetables in their yards or in containers: Every day I run outside before breakfast and I get my cherry tomatoes out of my garden to kind of go with my breakfast. Sometimes along with that meat and sausage and eggs and all of the stuff that you have, you need something else to kind of push it on through.

You can afford it. You have to grow your own garden. Once you pick everything out your garden and stuff, you don’t have no chemicals on it or nothing like that, and it comes out cheaper. What are the seeds? A dollar Most things you plant in the garden, it creates the seeds on the end and you can replant them the next year.

And if you don’t want to do it yourself, pay a person in the neighborhood, kids or somebody to dig a garden out and do your garden for you. If you don’t have time to do it, pay somebody to do that, 10 or 15 dollars, and get your garden done. All you got to do is water it and take care of it.

They get fresh fruits and vegetables near their neighborhoods: I would say living in this area right here there is no problem because we have this church, and we have that church. Every Tuesday they’re giving away fresh vegetables all the time. So we’re blessed with that. So, that makes up for the money issue because they do make healthy meal portions. And, there a lot of community gardens in the neighborhood.

They know about food resources at food pantries, churches, and community gardens: Or you can go into the food pantry, they have vegetables too. I’m a volunteer every Wednesday at a food pantry on Washington Avenue. After dinner we start the food pantry, and we’ve got a little slip that we go through, including how many is in the family. You get so much off of each shelf, but you get to pick what you want. You can get any kind of cereal, anything like that. And, when the fall starts, you can get vegetables and stuff. We’ve had cabbage, we’ve had turnips, we’ve had corn on the cob, and we’ve had cucumbers and onions.
Encouraging Young Children to Play Actively

Parents and grandparents get help from trusted family and neighbors

They take turns doing things like taking children to the park to play:
“Well, we as dads, we can’t go to the park every day. There are a lot of little boys down the street, so I go and talk to their fathers and say “You take my kid on Wednesday, I’ll take yours on Thursday”. And then that way that keep everybody active and that keep them doing what they wants to do and everybody is happy.

They encourage kids to play together: If you don’t have another child, there’s neighborhood kids. Let them race up and down the sidewalk. My 2-year-old grandson loves to race. He loves to race my 9-year-old up and down the sidewalk. He never wins, but he thinks it’s fun.

Parents and grandparents make being active fun

They play with their children: I do everything with my son. I mean, he’s the type that he don’t want to exercise, he’s always complaining, “Oh, I’m too tired and da da da” and so I have to make it fun for him. I’ll get outside, and I’ll play ball with him. I’ll go to the park with him and get on the swings and the slides and all that stuff and tell him that it is fun and that it’s good to be active, and I just make everything fun for him.

I think going outside with them too helps, like when I go to the park. Down here at Schiller Park, I’ll get on the slide, my sister goes on the slide with them, too. It makes them see me run; I love it.

They teach games to their children: I try to teach them different activities. Little children’s games. Red light, green light, hopscotch, red rovers, stuff like that.

Parents and grandparents take children to fun places

They take advantage of special discounts: If you have WIC or food stamps you can get a year round pass to COSI for $25. Two adults and up to 10 kids. You get in for a year. Now when they have the extra exhibits like the Titanic, you still going to have to pay to go see that, but everything else is free. It’s included in the cost of the pass, it is actually. They have stuff outside for playing. They have a playroom upstairs for the toddlers. It is exercise. It’s pretty big.

The most convenient thing right now seems to be is COSI. You know, you can go pack your lunch and walk around and it’s inside. It has a lot of places to go to.

They sign children up for classes and programs: I put my son in the free classes at the rec center at Schiller Park because they have a preschool class that’s called Sporties for Shorties. They have it at every different session, that they do. It’s always there. They get them together and then they teach them different sports. Like last summer time they did soccer and then they did hockey.

They have free programs at Schiller Park for kids 1 - 5, like gymnastics and stuff like that going on in the daytime. They have classes you pay for and they also have the free ones and you know, they have like free piano lessons and a lot of stuff. I did let my son do it one summer when he was like 2 or 3 years old.
Good places for little kids to play actively
from parents and grandparents of preschoolers who live in the south side

**COSI:** Many caregivers in the focus groups mentioned that they take their children to COSI to run around and be active. If you are on WIC or food stamps, a yearly membership to COSI costs $25 for your family! COSI is located at 333 West Broad St, (614)228-2674.

The YMCA offers swim, sports, and play programs for children of all ages. The YMCA of Central Ohio provides assistance to families based on needs. For more info, call (614) 224-1131 or go to: [http://www.ymcacolumbus.org/financial-assistance](http://www.ymcacolumbus.org/financial-assistance). (Note- the closest YMCA is located downtown.)

**Columbus Recreation and Parks** provides 55 parks in the south side. For the locations of parks near you, call (614) 645-3300 or go to: [http://getactivecolumbus.com/Map.aspx](http://getactivecolumbus.com/Map.aspx). Recreation & Parks offers the P.L.A.Y. program for financially challenged families with children 18 years and younger who want to participate in any fee-based program.
Tips for providing healthier foods for young children from parents and grandparents of preschoolers who live in the south side

- **Buy in bulk** – Larger sizes are often less expensive. Find friends or relatives to split larger bags of produce or larger packages of meats.

- **Buy frozen fruits and vegetables** – They often have the same nutrition benefits as fresh foods. Look for packages without added sugar or high levels of sodium.

- **Be aware of marketing targeted at young children** – Remember that many unhealthy foods are packaged in ways that appeal to young children and that sugary items are placed on shelves at your child’s level in many stores.

- **Keep learning** – Local parents get information from all kinds of sources: websites, WIC, libraries, books and magazines. They recommended [http://www.mypyramid.gov](http://www.mypyramid.gov), which is now [http://www.choosemyplate.gov/](http://www.choosemyplate.gov/).

- **Practice good teeth brushing** – Parents pointed out that if children and adults don’t have good dental health, they won’t be able to eat properly.

- **Drink tap water** – Sweetened beverages cost more, add calories to a child’s diet, and may take away their appetite for healthier foods and beverages. Water first for thirst!

- **Grow your own garden in your yard or using a container** – Some churches and organizations offer help to residents who want to start a garden. Container gardening is a great alternative if you have limited space. South side parents recommended growing tomatoes, peppers, herbs, and cucumbers.

- **Find organizations that provide healthier food options** – WIC provides vouchers that can be used for fruits and vegetables. The WIC program holds a farmers market on three Thursdays each summer. FOODLINK can provide callers with locations of food pantries, soup kitchens, and farmers markets in the south side and throughout Franklin County. Call FOODLINK at 2-1-1 or 614-341-2282.

The statements in *italics* included in this booklet were recorded during focus groups held in September 2010. The OSU Prevention Research Center conducted focus groups with 86 parents and grandparents of preschoolers who live in zip code areas 43205, 43206, and 43207. Some of the statements have been paraphrased slightly for clarity. The PRC extends special thanks to all parents and grandparents who participated in the focus groups.

**Survey of south side parents**

The Prevention Research Center continues to do research in the south side of Columbus and will conduct a survey of parents of children ages 2-5 beginning in early 2012.

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