

Parents learn skills to encourage healthier diet in children, without leaving the dinner table

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Credit: Drexel University

Thirty-one percent of children in the United States are overweight or obese according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Parents can play an important role in helping their children adopt healthier eating habits. But trying to encourage children to eat more vegetables and cut down on the sugary treats can be a daunting task. A new project from Drexel University's Center for Weight, Eating, and Lifestyle Science (WELL Center) called "Project PICNIC" aims to help parents guide their children toward healthier choices, without it turning into a battle of wills.

"Many parents want their child to eat more fruits and vegetables but find that they run into challenges because their child is picky or only likes a select sub-set of foods," said Evan Forman, Ph.D., a [psychology professor](#) in Drexel's College of Arts and Sciences and director of the WELL Center. "Other parents want to make changes but feel guilty not allowing certain foods in the house or saying 'no' to their child."

[Project PICNIC](#) is designed to help parents of 2-10 year-olds who want to promote a healthier diet for their child—for example, having the [child](#) eat more fruits and vegetables, and fewer sugary desserts and beverages—but who have difficulty doing so. The program directly targets the challenges faced by [parents](#) by using video-conferencing software to provide real-time parent coaching from WELL Center counselors on skills and strategies to manage challenging situations that arise while the family eats a meal in their own home.

"Most types of treatment require the parent or family to come into an office to learn new strategies, then go home and try to use them on their own, without any guidance or support," said Forman. "The unique advantage of this project is that it harnesses the power and ubiquity of video-conferencing calls, so families can receive expert coaching without having to leave their home. It's more convenient and the coaching they receive is going to be better tailored to exactly those challenges that a parent faces at mealtimes, because the coach is observing the interactions in [real-time](#)."

Project PICNIC is one of several new offerings by the recently opened Child and Adolescent Program within the WELL Center. The Child and Adolescent Program offers opportunities for [children](#), adolescents and families to receive treatment and participate in research related to eating and weight concerns.

"We are incredibly excited to offer this new program focused on providing the best, evidence-based treatment for eating and weight disorders for children and adolescents in our community," says Stephanie Manasse, Ph.D., director of the Child and Adolescent Program.

For more information about Project PICNIC and the WELL Center, visit drexel.edu/wellcenter.

Provided by Drexel University

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