



## Role of family and school environment in promoting a healthy lifestyle among adolescents

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### Abstract

Adolescence is a critical developmental period marked by rapid physical, psychological, and social changes that significantly influence lifelong health behaviors. A healthy lifestyle during adolescence—including balanced nutrition, regular physical activity, adequate sleep, stress management, and avoidance of risk behaviors—plays a vital role in preventing non-communicable diseases and promoting overall well-being. Family and school environments serve as the two most influential social systems shaping adolescents' lifestyle behaviors. Families provide the primary context for early health socialization through role modeling, parenting practices, and emotional support, while schools act as structured settings that promote health education, physical activity, and supportive peer interactions. This article examines the role of family and school environments in promoting a healthy lifestyle among adolescents, highlighting key determinants, mechanisms of influence, challenges, and evidence-based strategies. Understanding the synergistic role of family and school systems is essential for designing effective health promotion interventions aimed at fostering healthy behaviors during adolescence and beyond.

**Keywords:** Adolescents, healthy lifestyle, family environment, school environment, health promotion

### Introduction

Adolescence, defined by the World Health Organization as the age group between 10 and 19 years, represents a crucial transitional phase from childhood to adulthood. During this period, individuals establish health behaviors that often persist into adulthood, influencing long-term physical and mental health outcomes (World Health Organization [WHO], 2023) [4]. Unhealthy lifestyle behaviors adopted during adolescence—such as poor dietary habits, physical inactivity, excessive screen time, substance use, and inadequate sleep—are strongly associated with the rising burden of non-communicable diseases (NCDs), including obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, and mental health disorders.

Globally, lifestyle-related health risks among adolescents are increasing due to rapid urbanization, technological advancement, academic pressure, and changing social norms. In India and other low- and middle-income countries, adolescents face a dual burden of undernutrition and lifestyle-related disorders, making health promotion during this stage particularly important. The development of healthy lifestyle behaviors does not occur in isolation; rather, it is shaped by social, cultural, and environmental influences, particularly within the family and school contexts.

Families and schools are the primary social institutions that interact with adolescents on a daily basis. Family environments influence adolescents through parental modeling, dietary practices, physical activity norms, emotional support, and communication patterns. Similarly, schools provide structured opportunities for health education, physical activity, peer interaction, and access to supportive resources. Understanding the role of family and school environments in promoting healthy lifestyles among adolescents is essential for developing comprehensive, sustainable, and culturally appropriate health promotion strategies.

### Concept of a Healthy Lifestyle in Adolescence

A healthy lifestyle refers to a set of behaviors and practices that contribute to physical, mental, and social well-being. Among adolescents, key components of a healthy lifestyle include:

- Balanced and nutritious diet
- Regular physical activity
- Adequate sleep and rest
- Effective stress management
- Positive social relationships
- Avoidance of tobacco, alcohol, and substance use
- Limited screen time and healthy digital habits

Adopting these behaviors during adolescence enhances growth and development, improves academic performance, strengthens mental resilience, and reduces the risk of chronic diseases in adulthood (Sawyer *et al.*, 2018) [3].

### Role of Family Environment in Promoting a Healthy Lifestyle

#### Parental Role Modeling

Parents and caregivers serve as the first role models for adolescents. Children and adolescents often imitate parental behaviors related to food choices, physical activity, sleep routines, and stress coping mechanisms. Studies have consistently shown that adolescents whose parents engage in healthy behaviors are more likely to adopt similar practices (Birch & Ventura, 2009) [1].

#### Dietary Practices and Nutrition

Family food environment significantly influences adolescents' dietary habits. Availability of healthy foods at home, regular family meals, and parental encouragement of balanced diets are associated with higher intake of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. Conversely, frequent consumption of fast foods and sugary beverages within the family increases the likelihood of unhealthy eating patterns among adolescents.

### Physical Activity and Sedentary Behavior

Parental support and encouragement play a vital role in promoting physical activity among adolescents. Families that prioritize outdoor activities, sports, and reduced screen time create an environment conducive to active lifestyles. Parental restrictions on excessive screen use and encouragement of recreational activities are associated with improved physical fitness and reduced sedentary behavior.

### Emotional Support and Mental Well-Being

A supportive family environment characterized by open communication, emotional warmth, and positive parenting practices contributes significantly to adolescents' mental health. Adolescents who feel emotionally supported are more likely to engage in healthy behaviors and less likely to adopt risk behaviors such as substance use and unhealthy coping mechanisms.

### Socioeconomic and Cultural Influences

Family socioeconomic status and cultural beliefs also shape adolescents' lifestyle behaviors. Limited financial resources may restrict access to nutritious foods and recreational facilities, while cultural norms may influence dietary patterns and gender-specific physical activity participation.

### Role of School Environment in Promoting a Healthy Lifestyle

#### Health Education and Curriculum

Schools play a critical role in providing structured health education that equips adolescents with knowledge and skills necessary for healthy living. Comprehensive school health programs addressing nutrition, physical activity, mental health, substance abuse prevention, and sexual health have been shown to positively influence students' attitudes and behaviors (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2022) [2].

#### Physical Education and Sports

Regular physical education classes and opportunities for sports participation promote physical fitness, teamwork, and stress reduction. Schools that provide safe playgrounds, sports facilities, and inclusive physical activity programs encourage lifelong active habits among adolescents.

#### School Food Environment

The availability of healthy food options in school canteens and mid-day meal programs significantly affects adolescents' dietary behaviors. Schools that limit the sale of junk food and promote nutritious meals contribute to healthier eating patterns.

#### Peer Influence and Social Environment

Peers exert a strong influence on adolescents' lifestyle choices. Positive peer interactions within schools can encourage healthy behaviors, while negative peer pressure may promote risk behaviors. Supportive school climates that foster inclusivity, respect, and positive relationships enhance students' overall well-being.

#### Mental Health Support and Counseling

Schools that provide counseling services, life-skills education, and stress management programs help adolescents cope with academic pressure, emotional challenges, and social stressors. Such supportive

environments promote resilience and healthy coping strategies.

### Synergistic Role of Family and School

The combined influence of family and school environments is more effective than isolated efforts. Collaboration between parents, teachers, school nurses, and community health professionals enhances consistency in health messages and reinforces positive behaviors. School-based programs that actively involve parents have demonstrated greater success in improving adolescents' dietary habits, physical activity, and mental well-being.

### Challenges in Promoting a Healthy Lifestyle

Despite their critical roles, families and schools face several challenges in promoting healthy lifestyles among adolescents, including:

- Increasing screen time and digital addiction
- Academic pressure and lack of time for physical activity
- Limited parental awareness and involvement
- Inadequate school infrastructure and trained personnel
- Socioeconomic disparities

Addressing these challenges requires coordinated efforts at individual, family, school, and policy levels.

### Implications for Nursing and Public Health Practice

Nurses, particularly community health and school health nurses, play a pivotal role in promoting healthy lifestyles among adolescents. Their responsibilities include:

- Conducting health education sessions for students and parents
- Identifying at-risk adolescents and providing counseling
- Collaborating with schools to implement health promotion programs
- Advocating for healthy school policies and environments

Nurse-led interventions that engage both family and school systems can significantly enhance adolescents' health outcomes.

### Conclusion

The family and school environments play a fundamental role in shaping adolescents' lifestyle behaviors and overall health. Families influence adolescents through role modeling, emotional support, and daily health practices, while schools provide structured opportunities for health education, physical activity, and social development. A supportive, collaborative approach involving families, schools, healthcare professionals, and policymakers is essential for promoting healthy lifestyles among adolescents. Strengthening these environments can lead to improved physical, mental, and social well-being, ultimately contributing to healthier adult populations and reduced burden of lifestyle-related diseases.

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