



How to develop policy documents

1. Background

- There are a lot of statistics that show that South African children could benefit from changes in their lifestyle behaviour. Many South African children run the risk of becoming unhealthy adults with some of their current health behaviour. This ranges from diet and exercise to smoking.



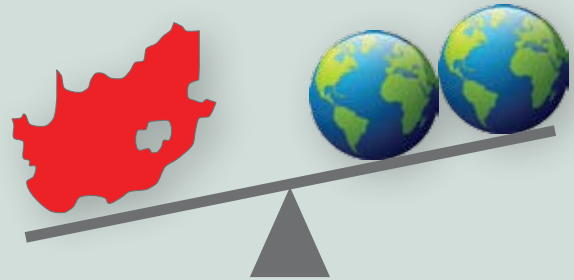
The 2010 Active Healthy Kids South Africa Report Card indicated that less than half of South African youths surveyed participate in enough physical activity for it to be considered 'health enhancing'.



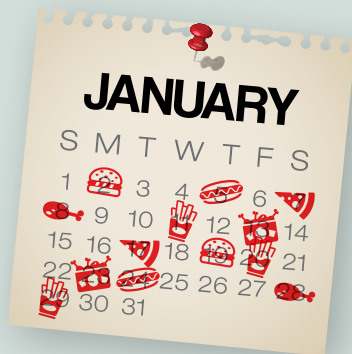
Nearly 30% of South African teens watch more than three hours of TV a day.



South Africa also has the highest prevalence of smoking throughout the African Continent with 21% of the youth admitting to being current smokers.



This figure is almost double the global prevalence estimates.



30% of kids eat fast foods between two and three times a week



SA children often drink sweetened cool drinks more than four times a week.



20% of teens are overweight and 5% are obese

2. Importance of school policies

Childhood and adolescence is a critical period for developing healthy eating habits. Attitudes towards physical activity and other behaviours, and schools can play a large part in encouraging healthy lifestyle behaviours that will carry children through into adulthood.

School policies are intended to help schools set and measure goals to encourage healthy habits in learners including good nutrition, regular physical activity and anti-smoking.

Without written policies, decisions on nutrition, smoking and physical activity practices are left to individuals, which can lead to inconsistent health messages, inappropriate messages or no message at all.

A health policy, for nutrition, exercise or smoking should provide clear standards that are implemented consistently throughout the school. By developing and implementing these policies, schools can help lower barriers to learning by providing an environment that promotes healthy behaviours.

3. Starting a school policy

Starting an effective school policy to promote healthy eating and physical activity needs leadership from the school. So, schools are encouraged to:



- **Set up a policy team**

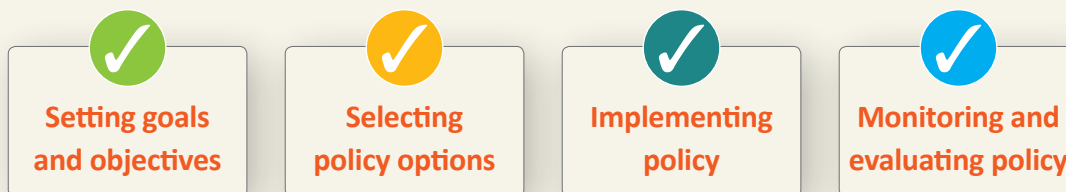
The coordinating team should include members from all stakeholder groups (parents, teachers, learners and healthcare providers). The coordinating team is accountable and transparent in its work.

- **Review current situation**

Before you can develop a policy, you need to understand what's happening (ie: what is and is not being done at the school to address healthy eating, physical activity and smoking). This will help the coordinating team to better understand the needs, resources and conditions that are relevant to planning interventions. The analysis will reveal target areas for policy development. For example, the school may realise that physical activity requires more focus, or that policies implemented need to be more gender-sensitive.

- **Develop a work plan and monitoring system**

After forming a coordinating team, determining its specific role, and undertaking review analysis, the team is encouraged to develop a work plan to implement appropriate policies in schools. Such a work plan should include:



Without a monitoring and evaluation system in place – there's no way to know if the policy is effective or not.

It is important to consider monitoring and evaluation at the beginning of the planning process and assign responsibility and appropriate funding. The monitoring and evaluation process should take place at regular intervals and make use of appropriate indicators.

- **Set goals and objectives**

Goals are defined as broad statements which describe the overall desired improvements related to healthy eating, smoking and physical activity in schools. Some examples of goals are:

- Provide favourable experience, sufficient skills and engrained behavioural patterns to lay the foundations for lifelong healthy eating and physical activity.
- Help learners maintain or improve physical fitness.
- Reduce incidence of Non Communicable Diseases (such as high blood pressure, obesity and type II diabetes) risk factors among school-aged children and adolescents.

Goals are then broken down into a specific process, output objectives and outcome objectives so that everyone clearly understands what needs to be done to achieve each goal, as well as when and why this needs to happen.

These objectives should be SMART:



- **Distribution of the policy**

Wide circulation of the school policy is necessary for it to reach its target audience and promote healthy eating patterns, smoking cessation and physical activity in schools. Distribution of the policy document to all relevant stakeholders is done through formal and informal channels (newsletters, notice boards, signs around the school etc.).

4. Drafting a school wellness policy

Although these policy documents are used on their own, it is strongly recommended that schools complete the Healthy School Index questionnaires before developing a policy document. The Healthy School Index can be used to identify the strengths and weakness of the school environment and policies in place. Once an overall picture is in place, it is easier and more effective to develop policies which take these factors into account.

Each policy document provides recommendations (not requirements) for policy content. Schools may choose to use the policy recommendations as written or revise them as needed to meet their own needs and reflect the school's priorities. When developing nutrition, smoking and physical activity policies, schools will need to take into account their unique circumstances, challenges, opportunities and available resources (these will be highlighted from the Healthy School Index questionnaires). Policies should meet local needs and be adapted to the health concerns, food preferences and dietary practices of different ethnic groups.