

Feel4Diabetes programme

Teachers' Guide



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Introduction

What is the Feel4Diabetes programme?

The current programme is a school- and community- based, family-involved intervention funded by the European Union. It aims to promote a healthy lifestyle for the families and their children, by working together with the teachers and the local municipalities to deliver an intervention with two components:

1st: A community component in collaboration with the Municipality.

2nd: A school component in collaboration with the school teachers and personnel, as well as with the parents.

- In collaboration with the municipalities the aim is to turn the neighborhood into a friendlier environment for active commuting and leisure time physical activity, providing more opportunities to the families for recreational physical activities.
- In collaboration with the schools the aim is to create a supportive social and physical environment to promote children's healthy lifestyle at school and engage children and their families to recreational physical activities taking place in their municipality after school hours on weekdays and on weekends.
- Parents will be involved via the schools. More specifically, newsletters will be delivered to the parents in order to raise their awareness regarding their children's healthy lifestyle and to support them in creating a healthy environment at home, as well as to ask them to actively support the activities conducted at school, inform them on events in the municipality regarding healthy lifestyle in which they could participate together with their children and promote their role as their children's role-models for health behaviours.
- In a subgroup of parents, additional counseling sessions will be implemented in order to examine if this additional support will further motivate parents and be more effective in getting them actively involved in the above.

This handbook is a simple guide on how to apply this programme in your school and how you could actively engage families, make bridges and actively support the children and their families to take part in the recreational physical activities taking place in the Municipality.

Why is the Feel4Diabetes programme important?

In Europe, the number of overweight children has significantly increased over the last two decades. Specifically, recent reports indicate that almost one in three European primary school children is overweight or obese. These worrying trends call for early public health obesity prevention initiatives from young ages. Among other factors, the increase in overweight and obesity is attributed to a combination of unhealthy diet, lack of physical activity and increased sitting time. These lifestyle habits are shaped during

childhood and often persist into adulthood, which indicates the importance of implementing such interventions in early childhood.

Why are schools important in shaping behaviour and promoting healthy lifestyle?

As children at the first years of primary education are still open for imprinting experiences, this age constitutes an optimal time point to sustainably influence health-related behaviours and thus set the course for a healthy lifestyle. Schools can play an important role in the promotion of healthy lifestyle among children. This is possible by incorporating healthy eating and physical activity in the school curriculum in fun and creative ways.

Children are learning by observing others, especially their role models such as their peers, parents and teachers. In Feel4Diabetes we do not just intend to ask you to teach children on healthy lifestyle, but with yours and parents' active and enthusiastic collaboration as role-models and involvement to create a supportive social and physical environment both at school and at home to promote the targeted behaviours, as described below.

School based component

This programme aims to promote healthy lifestyle from early childhood to support children's healthy growth and minimize the risk of early onset of obesity. To fulfill these goals, the current programme, focuses on the promotion of the following lifestyle behaviours for children and their families:

- Water consumption (instead of sugar-sweetened beverages)
- Consumption of healthy and balanced breakfast and/or morning snack
- Physical activity
- Decrease/interruption of prolonged sedentary time

These aims can be achieved by following the five steps below:

Step 1: Create a supportive environment at school

Step 2: Perform the actual behaviours aiming at total class participation daily

Step 3: Be an active and enthusiastic role-model

Step 4: Implement classroom activities

Step 5: Involve the parents via newsletters

In more detail:

Step 1: Create a supportive environment at school

Availability of healthy food as snacks, water or equipment that could be used for physical activity is of major importance when trying to promote healthy lifestyle behaviours in the school. Children at this age do not consciously decide on foods and drinks based on healthiness. Therefore, their choice of food is instead

mainly dependent on what is more attractive and appealing to them at that moment. If they are given the choice, children will follow their natural desire for sweet, fatty and high energy-dense foods, and sugar-sweetened beverages, driven by their natural instincts and rapid learning as to what satisfies their hunger and taste preferences best. Therefore, we need to ensure that we develop an environment free of unhealthy food options around them, while in the opposite it will provide a variety of healthy food choices attractive and appealing for the children. High fat and high sugar foods should be removed from their environment and a variety of healthy options (e.g. fruit) should be provided so that they can eat when they are hungry instead. Similarly, sufficient time, equipment and opportunities to be physically active and decrease/interrupt sedentary time should be offered at school.

Step 2: Perform the actual behaviours aiming at total class participation daily

Apart from the availability of a supportive environment for the desired behaviour, a second equally important parameter is to remind children to actually perform the behaviours, aiming at total class participation. Reminding and encouraging the children to drink water, consume healthy/balanced breakfast and/or morning snack, be physically active and do short movement breaks daily, ideally together with the teacher is of major importance. Planning and performing the behaviours daily will help children develop and maintain healthy habits, since gradually a “planned behaviour” will turn into a “habit”, increasing the likelihood to maintain it in the long term.

Step 3: Be an active and enthusiastic role-model

Children learn a lot by observing role models. Role models can be real persons like parents at home as well as their teachers and classmates at school. Children observe very closely how adults behave and whether they themselves meet the expectations their parents have for them. Children also observe to what extent their teachers enjoy drinking water or consuming a healthy snack and they may adopt attitudes like “I love drinking water!” and “Drinking water is so refreshing”, but also “I love having a fruit as a snack when I am hungry” or “Fruits give me the energy I need”. Therefore, it is important that you and your colleagues become aware of your own lifestyle behaviours, because unconsciously you are sending out messages to the children. Keeping in mind that parents, teachers and peers are the most important role models for this age, try to build alliances with peers and parents so that they copy your behaviour. By performing healthy habits with joy, you will fire children’s enthusiasm.

Step 4: Implement classroom activities

The implementation of classroom activities is aiming to assist children’s experiential learning rather than teaching children passively, by focusing on important dimensions determining human behaviour such as motivation, experience, self-efficacy, knowledge and skills. Moreover, they aim to the active co-operative participation of the whole class rather than having only a few children participating, thus targeting all

children. The activities included in the handbook are indicative, so teachers can adapt them to their school conditions and/or integrate new activities.

Step 5: Involve the parents via newsletters

Parents (and grandparents if they also act as caregivers for the child) determine children's food intake and physical activity level, but also act as role models since their own behaviours are copied by the children.

For all the above, it is very important that parents are actively involved in the programme. Via the newsletters that you will be distributing to them, parents will receive information and tips on how to create a more supportive environment at home and be good role models for their children regarding the targeted lifestyle behaviours. Moreover, they will be informed about the ongoing activities of this programme and asked to provide any support (e.g. healthy food items such as a fruit or vegetable, flask/bottle of water, appropriate dressing etc.) needed for implementing these activities at school.

However, teachers can make their own additions in the newsletters or organize extra activities at school to further support and motivate their pupils and parents to adopt the targeted lifestyle behaviours.

Community based component

The community component will aim to create opportunities for children and families to be physically active during afternoons and weekends. For this purpose, public areas such as parks, pedestrian roads, cycling or walking lanes, sports facilities or even school yards accessible after school hours (weekdays and weekends) could be used. These activities will be aiming to support parents and kids to get together, have fun, be more physically active and have good time by performing joyful and recreational activities. Such activities could be going for walking, cycling, treasure hunt, picnic, active play (e.g. hide and seek, jumping rope) or any other activity you could think of. These activities will be organized by initiatives taken by the University in collaboration with the local Municipality, but the active role of schools or individual teachers and parents' associations is more than welcomed and encouraged.