

STEP 2

STRATEGIES TO SUCCESS

Chapter 3: Behavioral and Social Approach

Community Guide Strategies for Physical Activity

Behavioral and social strategies are designed to give individuals both the skills and the social support they need to adopt and/or maintain healthy behaviors. These strategies reflect both the Individual and Interpersonal Levels of the SEM. You can promote individuals' behavior change through their interpersonal connections with other program participants and interaction with your Physical Activity Leaders (PALs) and Active Iowa Ambassadors (AIAs). For example, your participants can learn about goal setting, providing self-rewards, and problem solving to help maintain their physical activity levels, and PALs and AIAs can provide or help them obtain social support that reinforces that knowledge (Community Task Force). Some specific strategies include:

Physical Activity Groups. Organized groups that engage in physical activity together build social support and social networks within your community. Nine out of 10 interventions reviewed in the Community Guide that used walking groups or other activity groups as a program component reported increased levels of physical activity.^{35,36,37,46,47,48,49,50,51}

Examples:

- physical activity classes conducted on weekdays by PALs at various community locations (elementary school, community health center, etc.). Activities included walking groups, conditioning and strength-building exercises, circuit training, dance and aerobic exercises. Each class lasted about an hour⁴⁷
- group-based physical activity training sessions at a local senior center and community college. Activities such as walking and/or jogging⁵²
- information (handouts) on how to organize a walking and rolling group or walk/roll with a partner on a regular basis to create social support⁴⁶



Buddy Systems. Partnerships can support, motivate, and encourage individuals who are working to adopt new health behaviors. Several research studies have reported increased physical activity in programs that used a buddy system.^{35,36,37}

Examples:

- dividing group members into pairs that practice together, motivate each other, and check in on each other's personal efforts³⁵
- asking participants to organize a walking group and rolling or walk/roll with a partner on a regular basis, with the goal of walking at least three times a week for 20 minutes⁴⁶

Goal Setting and Self-Monitoring. These behavior modification strategies can create positive change in an individual's physical activity habits. Goal setting includes identifying a specific aim to achieve by a specific time ('I will be walking for at least 20 minutes each day for three days per week by next month'). Self-monitoring includes collecting data to keep track of progress towards goal (check box of days on which you walk or roll, writing down the minutes walked/rolled each time, etc). When used with other programs to promote health (such as those mentioned above), they have shown significant effects.³⁵

Examples:

- diaries as tools for self-monitoring of food intake and physical activity³⁶
- informational sessions to discuss goal-setting and self-monitoring of progress³⁵
- buddy system used to support development of goal-setting and self-monitoring skills³⁵
- telephone and mail contacts to follow up on participants' physical activity goals⁵³
- email messages with "small-step" goals to help participants develop realistic goal-setting strategies (example: I will walk /roll or do errands or window shop on my lunch hour rather than sitting in the cafeteria or at my desk, at least two days this week)^{54,55}

Self-reward and Positive Self-talk.

Positive self-talk can include having a positive or optimistic voice and view about the events happening in a person's life. Self-reward includes recognizing the accomplishments made and "rewarding" oneself when goals or milestones are achieved. These empowering strategies can help your participants change their behavior.⁵⁶

Examples:

- weekly sessions led by peer health educators that included strategies for implementing self-reward and positive self-talk. After the sessions ended, participants were contacted via telephone and mail to assist with the use of self-reward and positive self-talk physical activity strategies⁵³
- monthly newsletters that supported physical activity and encouraged the use of self-reward and positive self-talk⁵⁷

Physical Activity Contracts. Participants can make a contract with themselves, a program leader, or someone else that describes their goals and plans for increased physical activity. A commitment of this type, which feels more formal, can help participants attain exercise-related goals and stick to their plans. Research on programs that used physical activity contracts has reported significant behavioral change.^{36,55,58}

Examples:

- having participants sign contracts of agreement with co-signatures from a “buddy” and a family member³⁶
- asking participants to write down specific aerobic exercise programs they intended to follow for six months and add names of people who would be witnesses to the weekly exercise⁵⁸
- 15-minute face-to-face counseling sessions in which participants signed (and were given a copy of) a contract detailing their physical activity goals⁵⁶

Summary

The Community Guide’s recommended strategies for the Social and Behavioral approach include organized physical activity groups and classes that bring people together and give them encouragement as well as information. Group sessions can also cover how to set goals and how to monitor their own progress; skills can be reinforced by self-reward, positive self-talk, and buddy systems. Additional information, reminders, and motivational messages can be distributed by telephone, mail, email, and/or newsletters. Mobile apps are another useful tool for monitoring chronic conditions and promoting physical activity. More formal “contracts” can help participants maintain their commitment to their goals and plans.



Building awareness of your Active Iowa program can take several forms, from mass media campaigns to community-level programs. Messages can be distributed through television, radio, newspapers, websites, and public health programs (Community Guide). Adopting strategies from the campaign and informational approach can help you change attitudes, knowledge, and beliefs (the Individual Level of the SEM), as well as build the community's awareness and acceptance of your program (Organizational/Community Level).⁵⁹

Paid Advertising. The use of mass media is attractive given its ability to reach a large number of people. Newspaper, television, and radio ads can encourage communities to adopt healthy behaviors, but on their own they are less effective in changing behavior. Media strategies must be supplemented with other Active Iowa activities.^{60,61,62}

Examples:

- local radio, television, and newspaper messages to increase health knowledge, program awareness, and program activities⁶³
- a series of five-minute radio programs to raise awareness and community support for a public health program⁶⁴
- a weekly newspaper column⁶⁵

Community Events. Hosting or partnering around existing community events in your area provides opportunities to market your Active Iowa program. For example, your PALs may be able to lead physical activities at an event, engaging community members not yet involved with your program. Having informational programming and materials at large community events can increase the impact of your awareness-building efforts.^{60,66}

Examples:

- participating in “Open Streets” activities (see Chapter 5 – Open Streets Events)^{22,67}
- organizing a county celebration of National Trails Day, including hiking, walking, and biking events⁶⁸
- holding promotional and educational events connected with a Bike, Walk, and Roll Week, including bike repair and bike donation programs⁶⁹
- free fitness classes at a local community center, each class targeting a specific age group⁷⁰
- bicycle and pedestrian safety education offered to community members of all ages and a variety of ability levels^{67,69}

