**Reversing the trend**

Creating healthy habits in children requires action from the whole community. Families need to be supported by governments, businesses, schools, kindergartens, child care services, community groups, health professionals and other families.

Although parents feel they are primarily responsible for children’s health they expect schools to take a role in setting a good example for children through education, policies and the school environment. (Hesketh, 2005)

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**How can schools make a difference?**

Children learn healthy habits at home and at school. One of the best ways to support children to enjoy healthy eating and physical activity every day is to create environments that make healthy choices a regular part of every child’s day.

School communities are exposed to many messages about healthy weight, diet and nutrition. Sometimes these messages are contradictory. This can lead to confusion about how to approach these issues, especially with children of varying weights.

The World Health Organization encourages schools to take a Health Promoting Schools approach to support children’s healthy eating and physical activity. Rather than creating extra work, this approach encourages health behaviours to be incorporated into the day-to-day activities of schools.

The Health Promoting Schools model outlines six essential elements across three key areas – supportive environments, teaching and learning and working in partnerships (refer to diagram, p 1.9).

The Kids – ‘Go for your life’ Award Program and Award Plus programs are based on this model. Becoming a Kids – ‘Go for your life’ Award School is an effective and rewarding way to make a difference to the lifelong health and wellbeing of students.
SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENTS
Make healthier choices easier

Healthy school policies
School policies reflect school priorities, practices and values. Healthy eating and physical activity policies demonstrate a commitment to student health and wellbeing.

Physical environment
Buildings, grounds, roads, car parks, school crossings, play equipment, canteen and food services, eating areas and access to local shops and facilities can determine how easy or challenging it is for families to make healthy choices.

Social environment
Factors such as praise, attention, role modelling, expectations, use of rewards, encouragement and sharing, cooperation, peer pressure and bullying influence children’s perception and practices of healthy eating and physical activity.

Partnerships with families
When families and schools work together to provide consistent health messages and create healthy environments, it supports children to practice healthy habits as a normal part of everyday life.

Knowledge skills & behaviour
Through the delivery of the Victorian Essential Learning Standards, students can develop knowledge, skills and behaviours which enable them to take action to improve their healthy eating and physical activity habits.

Community & health service links
Local and regional health services, community organisations and many businesses can provide expertise and services to support the school community.

Children appear to believe that school, and anything permitted at school, is inherently healthy. (Hesketh, 2005)

Health promoting schools
Essential elements for healthy eating and physical activity in schools

Adapted from the Protocols and Guidelines for Health Promoting Schools, International Union for Health Promotion and Education, 2005.