
FAMILY GYM NIGHTS

Good Shepherd School

Peace River, Alberta, Canada

Good Shepherd’s Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) created Family Gym Nights to provide an opportunity for families to participate in healthy activities together, feel comfortable in the school, and assist their children as healthy active students at home. All activity nights invited students to attend with at least one parent.

Team members decided to hold a Family Gym Night for each grade during the school year. Promotion took place by using the school calendar and newsletter, hanging up posters around school, sending a smaller version of the poster home with students three to five days before the event as a reminder, and having teachers remind the targeted grade’s students to write down the date in their school agendas/day-timers. The local radio stations also announced the events on their community calendars.

For grades one through four Family Gym Nights, the gym was set up in a station format with pylons dividing the space into sections. Posters with game instructions hung around the gym so that families could be self-directed through the various stations. Upon completing an activity, families brought their record sheets, used to chart their progress through the stations, to the registration table to receive stickers, pencils, and a Smart Start Canada Food Guide to take home. Everyone went home with a *Handbook for Healthy Active Living* from the district coordinator or easy-to-make-and-do activities that could be done as a family.

The grades one through three Family Gym Nights incorporated stations using hula-hoops, beanbags, skipping ropes, basketballs, and a separate group activity using balance boards. The posters gave five challenges to try (e.g., “How many times can you toss the bean bag with your left hand/ your right hand?”) and an opportunity to develop a special trick at that station. The fourth grade Family Gym Night had a theme of “Goofy Olympics” because the event took place in February just after the Winter Olympics. The Goofy Olympics had ten non-competitive activity stations to visit like Feather Fun, Family Skipping, and The Rubber Boot Jump.

For the fifth- and sixth-grade Family Gym Nights, the theme was “Jungle Fever” a la Survivor. After a warm-up activity, which was developed and led by one of the sixth-grade students and her mother, the families divided into two tribes. After thinking of a tribe name and designing a poster, the two

tribes played a lively game of “Capture the Coconut,” a version of Capture the Flag. Two palm trees were home base, and the object of the game was to snag the other tribe’s three coconuts without being tagged. If a person was tagged, he/she was taken to that tribe’s jail, only to be freed by a tribe member wearing a special immunity necklace (a plastic lei).

Action Team members enthusiastically supported and staffed the event. One staff member supervised students writing thank-you cards to people who helped make Family Gym Nights a success. Staff and parents set up the reception area and the gym. All families helped with cleanup at the end of the events. Other assistance came from: community partners like the radio station that helped by advertising the events free of charge; the public division high school that lent equipment and decorations like the palm trees for Jungle Fever night; and the local convenience store that donated treats for the students to enjoy after the activity.

Students had a blast at each Family Gym Night. They had the chance to engage in healthy and fun activities with their moms, dads, siblings, and even some grandparents. Some moms and dads were surprised that they could not just come along and read a book on the sidelines! About twenty to thirty families attended the events, and some parents had never been to school before with their child. Families spent quality time together, in the hopes of kick starting or reinforcing healthy active lifestyles.

In the future, Good Shepherd plans to have a parent team from each grade assist with each grade’s Family Gym Night. Parent and student evaluations will be formalized. The telephone answering message also will be used to promote upcoming activities.

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