

Health education: An action for the learning and development of healthy skills and behaviors

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ABSTRACT

Experienced in childhood development and emotional regulation through Health Education programs. Specializing in enhancing cognitive and executive functions critical for lifelong resilience and decision-making. Proven ability to foster social interaction and inhibitory behavior in educational settings. Dedicated to optimizing children's mental and physical health at Américo de Viveiros Foundation, Rio de Janeiro.

Keywords: Learning, Emotions, Childhood, Health.

INTRODUCTION

In the first years of a child's life, the brain develops more rapidly. The different environmental conditions where children are born, grow, learn and live, through the modulation of gene expression, influence the developing brain. During childhood, the development of several skills takes place, and the foundations for the child's physical and mental health are constituted, which will influence the capacity for resilience against adverse circumstances, lifelong learning and behavior in adolescence, adulthood and aging. Emotions are important for survival, and survival is related to establishing social interactions and adapting to a certain environment. Acknowledging emotions and validating them is an important path to emotional regulation. Emotions are strong determinants in decision-making. It is up to parents and educators to help children in their emotional development. It is necessary to understand that the strengthening of the functional neural networks that act as a framework for cognitive and executive functions occurs through the experiences that take place throughout life. Thus, executive functions and self-regulation, being fundamental elements for the individual's life performance, develop. Only in adulthood will the networks involved in executive functions be fully activated and connected. Executive functions can be trained, and the lack of learning these functions during childhood and adolescence generates adults with impaired abilities to maintain a job, for example, with difficulties in relationships and social interaction. A retrospective look indicates that actions that support the development of these functions should begin in childhood. The school, as an affective and safe space for child development,

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understands that school performance is not only about learning the formal contents of education (mathematics, Portuguese, English, science, etc.). It is necessary to encourage development in shared spaces of social interaction, play, learning with playfulness. With regard to environments with distractions and multiple demands, inhibitory behavior for maintaining attention and performing learning tasks is fundamental. These are skills developed in childhood and contribute to the formation of individuals who are capable of making decisions in relation to various areas of their lives, such as health.

OBJECTIVE

The objective of this study is to verify the benefits of the application of the Health Education program in a group of 30 children between 9 and 11 years old, who attend the Américo de Viveiros Foundation, located in Rio Comprido/Turano favela/RJ.

METHODOLOGY

From February to May 2024, the first stage of the program entitled "Health Education: an action for the learning and development of healthy skills and behaviors" was applied. During this period, a total of seven fortnightly face-to-face meetings were held, with an average duration of one and a half hours, partly practical and partly theoretical. In these meetings, activities related to the understanding of mental and physical health, the relationship between body and brain, cognition, emotion, emotional validation and regulation, memory, and executive functions were developed. Playing and the construction of narratives, such as comic books, were tools used to work on the types of self-care: physical, mental, spiritual, social and intellectual, and executive functions. The program was conceived and structured by the institution Saúde Contato in partnership with the Américo de Viveiros Foundation, a non-profit entity, which has educational and social activities that contribute to the integral development of children.

RESULTS

The results, recorded through empirical observations and notes of verbal and written reports during the four months, pointed to positive changes in the actions related to the children's comprehensive health. The children were able to express their emotions and feelings through drawings, as well as verbally explain more confidently how to soften some feelings. The students were able to better understand the reason for expressing a behavior, and seek solutions to reduce the impact of that feeling on the behavior. According to the teacher's observations:

"The project took place in the fourth and fifth year classes in fortnightly periods, guided by profa. Jaine. Through breathing exercises, meditation and dynamics worked with the objectives of understanding, managing your emotions, frustrations and empathy. We noticed a significant increase in students' ability to identify and name their emotions. Making them safer and calmer even in school activities."



It is important to highlight the children's reports throughout the development of activities related to daily engagement in self-care attitudes, such as going to bed earlier, and adopting other behaviors that favor the improvement of physical and mental health. From the creation of comic books, attention, working memory, cognitive flexibility, planning, and inhibitory behavior were stimulated.

DISCUSSION

The development of executive function skills begins in early childhood and continues until youth, that is, this is a window of opportunity to work in a playful way with children on concepts of validation and emotional regulation, fundamental in the process of self-understanding and self-regulation. Health is not just the absence of disease, and one of its main determinants is the making of healthy choices. Thus, the formation of people with autonomy, critical and creative thinking skills is important for healthy cognitive, behavioral and social development. In the case of children, who live in regions of Rio de Janeiro in situations of social vulnerability, this task is challenging. Programs such as the one developed by our group are necessary, since they are of great help in the formation of individuals capable of assuming healthy behaviors and responsible for their choices and attitudes in life.

CONCLUSION

We found that the first stage of the program had a positive impact on the integral health of the children who attend the Américo de Viveiro Foundation. It is noteworthy that the participants became multipliers of the content learned, helping to engage other people in the family and surroundings for healthier attitudes.



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