

## A proposal for 2003: Keep kids more active

Get them out of the house  
for a walk or bike ride,  
or visit the library

In its annual survey, Children First of Oregon joined other groups in saying the state's budget crisis is threatening the health and safety of our children. Too many children are abused, and the state is falling behind in handling child-abuse cases and reports of suspected abuse. Too many children aren't covered by health insurance. And too many children go hungry due to unemployment or some other family crisis.

Certainly these are items that must be addressed when the Legislature convenes in just over a week. But not all the problems facing our children require money or help from the state or some other government agency. There are many issues in the Children First survey that parents can and should respond to - starting today.

It shouldn't come as any surprise that:

- 28 percent of Oregon eighth-graders are overweight or at risk of becoming overweight.
- 63 percent of eighth-graders get less than five days a week of

moderate exercise.

● 62 percent of eighth-graders spend two or more hours each day watching television, playing video games or using the Internet. (Meanwhile, less than two-thirds of eighth-graders meet or exceed the state standards for reading and math proficiency.)

What is surprising is that parents allow this situation to persist, perhaps in large part because we have many of the same bad habits - or worse!

We all could spend more time with our children, and not just watching TV together. Get out of the house; go for a walk or a bike ride; go swimming; or visit the library. It would be a monumental feat if our children - and ourselves - spent as much time reading books, magazines and the newspaper as we spend sitting in front of the tube, playing GameBoy and instant messaging. And our proximity to snow-covered mountains, ocean beaches and forested hiking trails leaves no more excuses for lazing about the house.

Engaging our children in more active, thought-provoking activities will bring benefits that last well beyond 2003. (rp)