



Teacher Guide Introduction

Welcome

Welcome to the “**Health Academy**” Project, an after-school health education program, scientifically evaluated and published, created to support middle school students in developing the habits and skills that lead to a healthier life. This guide is designed to provide you with everything you need: lesson plans, materials, and strategies to deliver the program with confidence and impact.

As a teacher, you are part of a larger movement to empower adolescents to take ownership of their health and well-being. The program emphasizes active participation, creativity, and family involvement, so that students leave not only with knowledge but also with the confidence to practice healthy habits in their everyday lives.

The “Health Academy” Project is part of a global effort to improve cardiovascular health and reduce risk factors from an early age. It is the product of collaboration between researchers, educators, and community partners who share one vision: to prevent disease before it begins, by equipping young people with the tools they need to thrive.



Dr. Valentín Fuster: Scientific Leadership and Vision



At the heart of this project is the leadership and vision of Dr. Valentín Fuster, President of Mount Sinai Heart, Physician-in-Chief at The Mount Sinai Hospital, and General Director of the National Center for Cardiovascular Research (CNIC) in Spain. Dr. Fuster is internationally recognized as one of the foremost leaders in cardiovascular medicine, and his pioneering work in both research and education has shaped how the world understands heart health.

Dr. Fuster believes that health education during adolescence can act as a “booster shot” that reinforces earlier messages and provides young people with renewed motivation and skills. His vision for this program is not only to reduce cardiovascular risk factors, but also to empower a generation of young leaders who understand that taking care of their hearts, minds, and bodies is both achievable and essential for their future.

Program Purpose

Cardiovascular disease (CVD) is the leading cause of death worldwide, and its roots often begin in childhood. Habits such as **physical inactivity**, **poor diet**, **inadequate sleep**, **unmanaged stress**, and **early exposure to tobacco** can shape lifelong health outcomes. Scientific research shows that early and repeated exposure to structured health promotion programs can improve behaviors, build resilience, and reduce risk across the lifespan.

The “Health Academy” Project builds on this evidence. It is a four-month after-school curriculum designed to strengthen health habits among adolescents aged 11–14 in New York City. The program seeks to act as a “booster” for students who may have been exposed to health education earlier in life, while also reaching those who are encountering these messages for the first time.

Program Overview



Duration:
4 months.



Format:
Twice per week, 55 minutes each session (32 sessions total).



Audience:
Middle school students in after-school programs.



Content:
Divided into three interconnected domains: Physical Health, Emotional Health, and Social Health.



Approach:
Interactive, creative, culturally responsive lessons designed for urban middle schoolers.
Each week follows a clear structure, with activities that move from energizing games to guided lessons, creative exploration, and reflection.



Materials and Resources

The “Health Academy” Project was designed to provide everything you need for successful implementation. Our goal is to equip you with ready-to-use, high-quality materials that make delivery smooth, engaging, and effective.

- **Teacher's Guide:** This guide is your roadmap.
- **Annexes and Worksheets:** Each lesson is supported by age-appropriate handouts and student-facing activities.
- **Visual Aids and Posters:** You will receive posters and activity cards.
- **Digital Resources:** The program incorporates engaging digital elements.

Ongoing Support: You are not alone in this work! In addition to materials, our team provides: teacher training, coaching and check-ins throughout the semester.

Session Structure

Every session in the “Health Academy” Project is built around a consistent structure that supports both engagement and learning.



Activation (10 min)

The session begins with an energizer designed to spark curiosity and get students moving.



Construction (20 min)

Teachers present essential concepts.



Exploration & Creation (15 min)

This is the heart of each session. Students actively apply what they have learned through interactive, student-centered activities.



Recovery (10 min)

Each session closes with a brief moment of reflection and consolidation.

Educational Goals

The “Health Academy” Project is carefully aligned with New York State’s middle school health standards, ensuring that lessons not only meet educational benchmarks but also address the real-world challenges faced by adolescents in today’s environment. The program is built around four key domains of health, each designed to strengthen students’ knowledge, skills, and behaviors.

1.**Physical Health**

Adolescence is a stage when lifelong habits around food, movement, and rest begin to solidify. The goal is to help students see their bodies as sources of information and strength, while giving them tools to make health-promoting choices.

2.**Emotional Health**

Middle school is also a critical time for identity formation, emotional regulation, and coping strategies. By normalizing conversations about emotions, the program aims to reduce stigma and equip students with lifelong mental health tools.

3.**Social Health**

Health is not only individual. It is also shaped by community, peers, and culture. This domain reinforces the idea that students are active participants in shaping their environments and can be leaders in promoting health within their peer groups.

4.**Family Engagement**

Adolescents' choices are deeply influenced by the adults and caregivers in their lives. For this reason, the "Health Academy" Project integrates families into the learning process. Family engagement not only reinforces classroom lessons but also helps establish consistent, sustainable habits in the home environment.

Behavioral Targets

Across all domains, the program targets specific health behaviors that research has shown to be critical for preventing cardiovascular disease and promoting lifelong well-being:

- **Nutrition:** Choosing balanced meals, limiting ultra-processed foods, increasing fruits and vegetables.
- **Movement:** Engaging in daily physical activity and reducing sedentary screen time.
- **Sleep:** Establishing consistent sleep schedules that allow for adequate rest.
- **Stress Management:** Using healthy coping tools instead of avoidance or risky behaviors.
- **Substance Prevention:** Recognizing the risks of tobacco, alcohol, and vaping, and developing refusal skills.
- **Behavior Intention & Self-Monitoring:** Learning to set health goals, track progress, and reflect on personal habits.

These behavioral goals are woven throughout the sessions in age-appropriate, engaging ways, whether through games, projects, discussions, or family activities.

Role of Teachers

Teachers are central to the success of the “Health Academy” Project. Your role extends beyond instruction: you are partners in a scientific study designed to evaluate the effectiveness of health education on adolescent behavior. Your responsibilities include:

- Deliver lessons with fidelity to the curriculum and protocols.
- Model healthy behaviors and enthusiasm for every activity.
- Encourage and motivate students, reinforcing positive behaviors.
- Facilitate discussion and critical thinking, supporting research on adolescent learning.
- Oversee data collection, including student behavior logs and participation records.
- Ensure consistency and accuracy in completing program activities and challenges.
- Support a classroom environment where reliable measurement of outcomes is possible.

Your commitment to these responsibilities ensures that the program is both impactful for students and scientifically rigorous for the study.

Role of Families

The “Health Academy” Project recognizes that families and caregivers are the most consistent influence in an adolescent’s life. While teachers introduce knowledge and skills, it is families who help anchor these habits in everyday practice. Each week includes simple but meaningful opportunities to connect learning at school with life at home:

- Weekly Challenges
- Take-Home Activities
- Reflection Prompts

Students not only benefit from their own new skills but also influence and are influenced by the habits of the people they live with. This helps create healthier families.

FAMILIA Reunion Project: Components

Physical Health	WEEK 1 Guide: IN MOVEMENT	Session 1. Movement is Life
	WEEK 5 Guide: WE DANCE	Session 2. Barriers and Boosters
	WEEK 9 Guide: ADDING MINUTES OF MOVEMENT	Session 9. Dance and Health Session 10. Discovering Your Style Session 17. Hidden Exercise – Adding Movement to Daily Life Session 18. What Sport Is Right for Me?
Emotional & Social Health	WEEK 2 Guide: WHAT AM I FEELING AND WHY?	Session 3. What Are Emotions and Why Do We Have Them?
	WEEK 6 Guide: WHO AM I AND WHY DO I LOVE ME?	Session 4. Naming and Understanding Emotions Session 11. The Qualities and Strengths I Appreciate In Myself
	WEEK 10 Guide: HOW DO I DEAL WITH HARD EMOTIONS?	Session 12. The Influence of Others on My Self-Esteem Session 19. Trying Out Strategies for Tough Emotions Session 20. Building My Regulation Toolkit
Nutrition/ Healthy Eating	WEEK 3 Guide: HEALTHY BREAKFASTS	Session 5. Why Breakfast Matters Session 6. Sugar and Balance
	WEEK 7 Guide: WHAT FUELS MY BODY?	Session 13. What is Healthy Eating? Session 14. What Are Food Groups and How Do We Combine Them?
	WEEK 11 Guide: DO WE KNOW WHAT WE EAT?	Session 21. What Is In Our Food? Session 22. Ultra-Processed? No Thanks!
How The Body Works: Rest & Sleep	WEEK 4 Guide: WHY DO WE SLEEP?	Session 7. Why Do We Sleep? Session 8. Habits That Help Us Rest
	WEEK 8 Guide: A HEART FOR LIFE	Session 15. Know Your Heart Session 16. Protect Your Heart
	WEEK 12 Guide: STRESS, ANXIETY & EMOTIONAL RELEASE	Session 23. What Is Stress and How Does It Affect Me? Session 24. Letting Go Humor, Reframing & Building Your Toolbox for Stress
Celebrate & Revisit What We Learned	WEEK 13 Guide: HEALTHY CELEBRATIONS AND SMART CHOICES	Session 25. Celebrating Myself and My Health Session 26. Smart Choices in Moments of Hype
	WEEK 14 Guide: HOW MUCH DO WE EAT AND WHY?	Session 27. What and How Much Is on My Plate Session 28. Why Do I Eat and How Do I Feel?
	WEEK 15 Guide: BECOMING THE BEST ME	Session 29. The 4Ts and 4As for a Healthy, Fulfilling Life Session 30. Building Good Habits and Replacing Unhelpful Ones
	WEEK 16 Guide: CELEBRATING OUR JOURNEY	Session 31. The Great Health Recap Challenge Session 32. Healthy Celebration & Goodbye Party

FAMILIA Reunion Project: Curriculum Overview by Session

Week	Title	Session	Focus	Topic Focus
1	IN MOVEMENT	s1	Welcome & Team Games	
		s2	Movement & Collaboration	
2	WHAT AM I FEELING AND WHY?	s3	Emotional Awareness	
		s4	Expressing Feelings	
3	HEALTHY BREAKFASTS	s5	Why Breakfast Matters	
		s6	Sugar & Balance	
4	WHY DO WE SLEEP?	s7	Importance of Sleep	
		s8	Sleep Habits	
5	WE DANCE	s9	Dance & Rhythm	
		s10	Dance & Group Expression	
6	WHO AM I AND WHY DO I LOVE ME?	s11	Who Am I?	
		s12	Why Do I Love Me?	
7	WHAT FUELS MY BODY?	s13	Energy from Food	
		s14	Balanced Meals	
8	A HEART FOR LIFE	s15	How the Heart Works	
		s16	Protecting the Heart	
9	ADDING MINUTES OF MOVEMENT	s17	Movement in Daily Life	
		s18	Exploring Sports	
10	HOW DO I DEAL WITH HARD EMOTIONS?	s19	Unhealthy Emotional Reactions	
		s20	Healthy Strategies for Regulation	
11	DO WE KNOW WHAT WE EAT?	s21	Reading Food Labels	
		s22	Ultra-Processed Foods & Ingredients	
12	STRESS, ANXIETY & EMOTIONAL RELEASE	s23	Unhealthy Emotional Reactions	
		s24	Healthy Strategies for Regulation	
13	HEALTHY CELEBRATIONS AND SMART CHOICES	s25	Food in Social Life	
		s26	Making Smart Choices	
14	HOW MUCH DO WE EAT AND WHY?	s27	Portions & Mindful Eating	
		s28	Why We Eat	
15	BECOMING THE BEST ME	s29	Identity & Growth	
		s30	Social Norms & Choices	
16	CELEBRATING OUR JOURNEY	s31	Great Health Recap Challenge	
		s32	Closing Celebration	

Color Key:

 Physical Health

 Emotional & Social Health

 Nutrition/Healthy Eating

 How The Body Works: Rest & Sleep

 Celebrate & Revisit What We Learned