Promoting an Active Life for Children & Young People

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Project Coordinator eat well be active
- Primary School Project

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Government of South Australia
Session outcomes

• To understand the difference between fitness and physical activity
• To understand the implications for designing developmentally appropriate programs for children and young people
Fitness, Exercise, or Activity?

- **Fitness:** A set of attributes that people have or achieve relating to their ability to perform physical activity (USDHHS, 1996)

- **Exercise:** Leisure time physical activity conducted with the intention of developing physical fitness.

- **Physical Activity:** Bodily movement that is produced by the contraction of skeletal muscle and that substantially increases energy expenditure (USDHHS, 1996)
Are Today’s Youth Physically Fit?

• No, if you listen to many teachers
• No, if you listen to many parents who remember how fit they were as youth
• No, if you listen to the least active group (adults) label the most active group (youth)
• Yes, if you look at research data but it depends which data you review
Fitness Test Results

• To be labeled as fit, children and young people must often pass a battery of tests
  • If youngsters didn’t meet 85\textsuperscript{th} percentile on all tests, youngsters were labeled unfit
  • Less than one tenth of one percent of students were able to pass all the tests in the USA (Corbin & Pangrazi, 1992)
  • This shows that a battery of tests will always fail the majority of people
Why Little Change in Fitness levels?

- Elementary school youth show little physiological response to training (Payne & Morrow, 1993)
- Fitness is strongly influenced by genetics (Bouchard, 1993)
- Youngsters may be at a satisfactory fitness level because they are more active than any other age group
Fitness is Controlled by Many External Factors

- Physical performance is controlled by many factors:
  - Maturation - age differences of 3 months impact performance scores
  - Nutrition
  - Genetic Predisposition
  - Trainability
Limiting Factors on Performance

- Trainability
- Genetic Predisposition
- Maturation, Diet, Activity
Mass Prescription

- Assumes all people need the same workload
- Assumes one fitness battery measures many different sizes and shapes of people
- Assumes we know the correct workload for all of our students
- Takes away exercise independence – the motivation to keep active
Is Fitness the Right Goal for Inactive Children & Young people?

• Fitness is a product that many can’t reach, no matter how hard they try – so they quit trying
• Some people are non-responders to fitness activities
• Many of the tests are not appropriate for obese youngsters
A summary of existing Australian weight data

% of 5 - 15 yr old children who were overweight

J Dollman & K Norton, University of SA
Obese Young People & Fitness

- Obesity has increased rapidly in Australia among young people.
- Failure on a fitness test discourages obese young people – goals are unrealistic for them.
- Heavy emphasis on fitness has not reduced obesity among young people.
Why Physical Activity?

• Inactive people have twice the risk of developing heart disease
• Inactivity is a primary risk factor for heart disease (so are smoking, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol)
• Reduces risk of cancer and diabetes
• Improves posture and reduces lower back pain
• Is as effective as psychotherapy for treating depression
Physical Activity: Youth & Adults Differ

• Adults participate in low volume - high intensity activity (fitness-based activities)
• Children and young people participate in high volume - low intensity activity (movement-based activities)
• Children and young people don’t like extended bouts of high intensity activity (particularly inactive young people)
• Children and young people naturally move in high-low intensity activity patterns (may stimulate growth, Bailey, et.al., 1995)
Activity Is for All Students

• Regular activity for young people increases the probability of an active adult lifestyle (Raitakari, et al., 1994; Telama, et al., 1997)

• Children and young people who are active at 3 or 4 years of age, are more active as adults (Pate, et al., 1996)

• Moderate activity offers lifetime benefits

• Activity helps those who need it most - unskilled and obese youth
Our Focus: Fitness or Activity?

• When children and young people fail fitness tests, they are labeled as unfit; being identified as inactive is less derogatory
• Fitness is controlled genetically; activity is for all students regardless of ability
• Fitness is comparative; activity is individual and personal
• Fitness is short term; activity is long term
Our Focus: Fitness or Activity?

- Activity can be monitored; fitness testing is difficult and inaccurate (especially with children)
- Activity can be done outside of physical education classes
- Activity needs to be valued as much as intense exercise or sport related activities
- Activity is a lifetime activity
How much and what type of physical activity?

R. Pangrazi, C. Corbin & R. Lindsey
What is Active Living?

• Moderate, intermittent, and success oriented
• All activity is valued
• Balance of strength, flexibility, and aerobic activities
• Assures expenditure of 6 to 8 kcal/kg/day
• Incorporates everyday activities, i.e., walking, riding bike, etc.
Perhaps it’s also about sedentary behaviours
ACHPER (SA)

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