

# Teaching Kids To Love Exercise

by Dr. Jenn Berman\*

"As Ellyn Satter points out in her book, *Your Child's Weight*, parents of older children are responsible for providing a safe experience for their children to exercise and enjoy movement, but it is up to the children to decide how much movement they will do. The more you push your child to be active, the less likely he is to associate exercise with pleasure.

## Emphasize Fun

The only way to get a child to exercise is by making it fun. As Rae Pica points out in her book, *Your Active Child*, "Children should never be encouraged to exercise because it will make them look good, even if obesity is an issue. [This] places the wrong value on physical activity — and appearance!" Parents who emphasize the functionality of their children's bodies are more likely to raise active children who feel good about their bodies than parents who

focus on the way their kids' bodies look. Children who feel good about themselves feel freer to move.

It is important to keep exercise age appropriate. Children who are given activities that are too difficult become frustrated and give up, while those who are given activities that are too easy become bored.

According to the authors of *Fit Kids*, researchers have come up with several key reasons why children find physical activity fun. Exercise provides kids with:

1. positive interactions;
2. praise from their peers and coaches;
3. support;
4. mastery;
5. recognition;
6. enjoyment of physical sensations

## The Importance of Play

Children's physical activity should start with free play. When they get to be six or seven years old, kids become capable of more organized physical activity, owing to their increased attention spans and ability to conceptualize more complex rules. It is not until they are between eight and ten that they become developmentally ready to experiment with competitive sports. It is at that age that they become

capable of conceptualizing and implementing strategy. Most experts recommend that children should stay away from high-pressure, competitive teams until they are eleven or twelve. Be careful not to pressure them to participate in a particular sport. Children will organically gravitate to sports that interest them.

## Do as I Say; Do as I Do

Studies show that kids are more affected by what you do than what you say. Telling your kids to be active when you sit in front of the television renders your words totally ineffective. A child who has an active parent is six times more likely to be physically active himself. Children with two active parents are six times more likely to be active.

Taking a walk after dinner or throwing a ball around in the backyard are great ways to enjoy being physical as a family. Not only do these activities help your child become healthier, but they help your family become closer."

*\*From the book, The A to Z Guide to Raising Happy, Confident Kids by Dr. Jenn Berman. © 2007 Jenn Berman. Reprinted with permission from New World Library. www.newworldlibrary.com*

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