



A Healthy Mind and A Healthy Body: Help for Overweight Children

AMY GLAZER

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, more than 16% of children (over 9 million) ages 6-19 are overweight or obese. This number has tripled since 1980.

"Childhood obesity is a serious problem that can impact a child's health and their emotional development," said Dr. Naomi Greenblatt, medical director of The Rocking Chair, a wellness center in Englewood. "Children who struggle with obesity are at an increased risk of diabetes, high blood pressure, asthma, sleep disorders, early puberty, and eating disorders. These children also face social and emotional issues, such as low self-esteem, bullying, and behavior and learning problems, which can lead to depression and anxiety."

To help parents combat this growing problem, a number of facilities in our area offer counseling, fitness training, and support to help children and teens lose weight and maintain a healthy lifestyle.

Building Self-Esteem

Being a kid is hard enough, but when you are 10 or 20 pounds overweight—or more—it can be brutal. Therefore, it is not surprising that children with weight issues suffer from poor self-esteem. Programs for children focus as much on building a child's self-image as they do on losing weight.

The Rocking Chair offers nutrition and exercise programs for children and teens. "The goals of the programs are to optimize the health of children and teenagers and to build their self-esteem in a positive manner," explains Dr. Greenblatt. "The child is rewarded for

staying committed to the plan. We place a great deal of focus on the effort, not just the end result."

According to Joseph Agosto, owner of JAG Health & Fitness in Tenafly, "Self-esteem is a big issue with children battling with their weight. I find that positive feedback, along with honesty and sincerity, provides a nurturing environment where they can be comfortable conversing and asking questions."

At Camp Pocono Trails, New Image Weight Loss Camp in Pennsylvania, owner Tony Sparber sees building a child's self-confidence as one of the most important reasons parents send their children to his program. "Children leave camp with higher self-esteem, higher self-confidence, and do better in school," he says. "Our camp runs deeper than weight loss. We do a good job of raising the self-esteem of children and making them feel good about themselves."

A Multi-Disciplinary Approach

Unlike an adult who may just hire a trainer or consult a nutritionist independently to get healthy, those focusing on weight loss and management in children understand that it is important to educate the child about all aspects of health.

"It is not just as simple as putting our kids to work," Agosto says. "Educating them is more important. They should know the dangers of being overweight and what it can lead to as they mature into adults. Then we can assist by providing them with the tools that they need to win the battle over time and live healthier lifestyles."

To that end, Agosto's program offers private one-

on-one sessions, partner sessions, boot camps, group training with nutritional rap sessions, and sport-specific training sessions. "All programming focuses on teaching the participants age-appropriate exercise routines that teach proper form and technique to avoid injury."

At the Bergen County YJCC in Washington Township, the fitness department offers a Junior Fitness Program for children 11 and up. The program, taught by certified personal trainers, "teaches your child basic knowledge of the importance of exercise, human anatomy, basic healthy eating habits, and safe techniques for using exercise equipment," explains Isaak Gorelov, director of health and wellness.

The YJCC also offers Optimum Training and Conditioning (OTC) for kids and teens, ages 10-15. This program allows kids to learn training techniques in a social atmosphere with friends.

The program at Camp Pocono Trails mimics a traditional camp in many ways. However, it is much more structured than an average camp, says Sparber. Additionally, the camp program offers nutrition and cooking classes to teach proper eating habits.

The Rocking Chair has a very personal approach to weight loss and management. "At the initial consultation a member of our team meets with a child and his/her parents to explore the risk factors for obesity, as well as the current challenges the child is faced with. Based on this consultation, a treatment plan is recommended that may include nutritional guidance, exercise, and therapy," explains Dr. Greenblatt. "All of these services are managed with a team approach to maximize success and make the experience a positive and motivating one."

Investing in your Child

Deciding to enroll your child in a weight loss program can be a difficult decision for some parents. Sparber recommends looking into a program if your child is not in his normal weight range, lethargic, and has self-esteem issues as a result of his weight.



"I believe that (sending your child to this) camp is a great investment in their future. This camp is a life-changing experience with long-term ramifications," Sparber states.

"Parents are doing their children a tremendous service by recognizing that obesity is an issue, or might become one, and getting professional guidance in addressing it. If there are risk factors for obesity, we recommend that parents be proactive about getting their children involved in an exercise program and good eating habits," says Dr. Greenblatt.

Agosto maintains that having the child buy into the program is paramount to success. "I feel that it is important to the child to make the final decision. From my experience, children who are forced into these types of programs usually participate for a short time and then quit," he says. "If your child is against it, then try to compromise with them by having them try one class or session and then let them make their decision afterwards. Children who take the responsibility will usually be more receptive to what is being taught to them and tend to be more successful."

Weight Loss Contact Information

Camp Pocono Trails, New Image
Weight Loss Camp
Reeders, PA
800-365-0556
www.camppoconotrails.com

Bergen County YJCC
605 Pascack Valley Road
Washington Township
201-666-6610
www.yjcc.org

The Rocking Chair
60 Grand Avenue
Englewood
201-308-5325
www.therockingchair.org

JAG Health & Fitness LLC
Tenafly
201-403-4151
jaghealthfitness@yahoo.com