

This Is Better Than Walking

Picture these third-, fourth-, and fifth-graders as future parents and grandparents. They'll have an astounding story to tell. "Why, back when I was a youngster, we used to get up in the morning and go to the schoolyard to do pushups! Voluntarily! In the summer!"

The ECHO (Educating Children for Healthier Outcomes) program is attracting kids to a three-times-a-week fitness program at Journey Elementary School in Sioux Falls. And the kids are loving it. Take that, naysayers who claim today's youngsters refuse to separate from their video games.

Upward spiraling childhood obesity and diabetes rates worry Dr. Annette Bosworth, who believes regular exercise is one way to combat the trend. She hopes to see this new program spread to other neighborhoods and communities.

Don't worry, this is no tough-love

boot-camp program. ECHO kids arrive ready for fun and games, hardly suspecting trainers Amy Peterson and Raul Meza will manage to inject subtle lessons about nutrition and fitness.

"Last week, one of the dads stayed to watch, and when we talked about our No Soda Challenge, he said, 'Now I get it. In restaurants, my son has been saying he'd prefer water.' This dad added, 'And we love it that this good advice is coming from you and not from us! He's paying attention because you're his coach.'"



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Uphill to School, Both Ways

Raul asked one of the mothers if she'd noticed any changes. "My kid is normally lazy," she whispered. "If there's no organized sports season at the moment, he'll just lie around. But he's so excited about this—about working out. He brought the whole family to the park the other day to teach us one of the games you play. He doesn't know he's working out; he thinks he's just having fun!"

Over time, some youngsters catch on to the real reason for all this active play. Recently, a child noticed playing tag has something in common with a structured workout. "Awww," she said, "You've got us running again!" Nah, replied Raul, we're just playing tag. He didn't bother to mention how a kid who plays tag all summer will be fit enough to walk—whether uphill or down—by the time school starts next fall.

