

Training Children

By Tracy Anderson

Toady's pre-pubescent children are heavier and more "out of shape" than ever. What ever the cause may be, as a society, we must take action and educate the parents and children about proper nutrition and exercise. A good friend of mine, Michael Nelson, spoke to teachers and staff at a local school in Tulsa, Oklahoma. In his speech, he brought attention to how we award children with candy, junk food or allow them to watch extra TV. He stated that children will associate these bad habits with good behavior. So the question is how can we, as trainers, effectively train children, and develop training methods that will yield results without injury. Helping children lose weight is the main focus of this article, sports performance will come later.

Methods that are affective with children are numerous, but I have developed one that holds the child's attention, yields great results, is safe and is easily applied. Simply take the child's natural movement and apply some type of resistance or incorporate it in an exercise movement. You must realize that children move differently than adults as well as metabolize nutrients differently. Children also react differently to exercise than do adults. They do not have closure of the epiphyseal plates, so compression of joint exercises are not recommended. Overweight children often have knee problems, so special attention must be paid to strengthening the knee joint capsule. Learning a simple, and natural, motion such as running, or sprinting, can be hindered by severe overweight children. Teaching children how to run and lengthen their stride is difficult and time consuming, but will yield great benefits. Many considerations must be taken in account while designing a program for America's youth, and these are just some.

An effective method for children is to keep the entire workout aerobic, while pushing water during and after exercise. Strength training with children is far less effective, because their hormonal response is somewhat negligent. While their energy systems function similar to adults, the healing systems are quite different. Adding resistance to simple motions will strengthen their muscles, while allowing their joints to move in their natural planes of motion. Some examples of this type of training are:

* Using flex bands while sprinting. These are not the thera-bands used in therapy offices, they are thick, long bands that have resistance loads of anywhere from 10 pounds to 100 pounds. Link the bands together and attach it to a fixed point. Have the child place the other end around their waist. Then the child will start sprinting, only about 10 yards. The farther away he/she goes, the more resistance the band applies. This will develop speed /strength while maintaining the aerobic state. The child will continue back and forth for 10-12 times. This method is used by professional athletes around the country, and is an effective method for children.

* Performing a giant set or "round robin". Choose four or five simple motions or exercises and have the child perform each one for about one minute or for a set amount of repetitions. Light dumbbells, jump ropes, medicine balls, bands and anything else that is simple to use, can be utilized in these exercises. Repeat this sequence for four or five times. Some examples of exercises used during a round robin might be:

- Jump Rope
- Push Ups
- Sit Ups
- Leg lifts
- Lying tricep extension using a medicine ball
- Chest press using a medicine ball
- Bicep curls using light dumbbells
- Shoulder press using light dumbbells
- Sprints
- Passing the medicine ball
- Side twists while holding the medicine ball or handing it to a trainer on each side
- Squats or lunges with or without dumbbells or medicine ball
- There are just too many to list. Only your imagination will limit your exercise list.

* Using Cardio equipment, like treadmills, bicycles, roller blades and anything else that requires exertion. Walking on the treadmill for 15 minutes before and after an exercise session is a great way to warm up and cool down.

* Time a distance run. Time the child in a 1 mile run, every other week. Let the child see the progress he/she is making. The distance is not too long to be accomplished, but is long enough to elicit a challenge.

The types of training are limitless and the types I have mentioned keep the child's attention, makes exercise fun and gets results. I know they work, I have used them on children a lot, and get great results. One boy went from 188 lb. to 142 lb. in three months, another boy went from 206 lb. to 160 lb. in five months, a girl went from 193 lb. to 145 lb. in four months, all using my program.

Now you can't expect children to eat like bodybuilders, they have to like their food. So you must teach them, and their parents, how to eat healthy, using everyday foods, and not be repetitive. The more fun you make the exercise sessions and the easier you make their nutrition plan, the better the results will be and the longer the child will continue to lose weight. This of course will lead to a healthier young adult, physically and socially.

I don't recommend exercising longer than a hour, that includes the two 15 minute treadmill sessions. It's just to hard to hold a child's attention for much longer and keep it fun. If it's not fun, the child will rebel and not put forth effort during the sessions.

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