



School Counsellor Newsletter

Edition 44

Promoting positive body image in boys: Let's talk about exercise

This newsletter is the third in a series inviting parents to learn about how behaviour and language can contribute to body image, shape and weight concerns – along with unhealthy eating – among boys. This newsletter focuses on key messages about exercise. It is based on the excellent advice provided by The Psychology Hub's registered nurse and therapist, Anna Comins, and senior clinical psychologist, Jo Vallance, in the livestream they delivered to the Medbury and Christ's College parent community on 7 September.

Jo and Anna have a number of quick and easy points to remember about exercise and boys:

- Keep it fun
- Keep it social
- Keep it balanced and remember to have non-exercise days too
- Keep in mind that your son will require more food to fuel his body when he is exercising, especially on days he might have sports training during lunchtime or after school.

Exercise is an important part of a healthy lifestyle so it is important to instil a sense of fun when it comes to exercise. If something is fun then your son will naturally want to do more of it. Different children will suit different types of exercise, so help your son to find something that works for him so that he enjoys exercise. As well as exercise being fun, if exercise is something your son can do whilst he is socialising with his friends, he is likely to want to do more of it. As well as encouraging exercise, it is also important to encourage interests that are not exercise, performance or competition based - exercise is an important part of life but it is not the only thing that

is important in life. As parents, you are an important role model to your son in how you approach exercise. You might like to consider how you are role modelling exercise as something that is fun, social and balanced in your life.

Talk with your son about why exercise is important. It will help his mental health and can be one way to relieve stress or cope with challenges. It will also be helpful for your son to appreciate what his body can do, for example how he can run fast or slow, jump low or high, lift things and stretch in different ways, all of which help him to live a full life. When it comes to the competitive side of exercise and sport, It is also an important life skill to learn how to lose and face disappointment.

Signs and behaviours of concern to watch out for in your son include:

- At your son's age exercise should not be something he is doing to lose weight or so that he can eat more. Seek support if your son is distressed about missing out on exercise, exercises even if he is injured, or is exercising in secret.
- If exercise or sport is the only thing that supports your son's self-esteem you will need to encourage him to find confidence in non-exercise related interests, otherwise his life will not be balanced and he may become obsessive about exercise.
- Be aware that your son will not be able to gain muscle until he has gone through puberty. If gaining muscle is something your son is mentioning, talking with him about this will be useful.

Signs and behaviours of concern to watch out for as your son gets older include:

- If your son is heavily involved in an exercise that requires extra training and increased fuel intake, it will be important to support him when he stops doing this exercise so intensely otherwise there may be a risk of disordered eating.
- Be curious about diets or programmes your son may be following online which promote over-exercising, using the gym and fitness to promote self-esteem and eating for purpose rather than pleasure, all with the goal of creating a muscled and sculpted body. These diets and programmes can be dangerous physically as well as emotionally and mentally. This will be discussed further in the newsletter about social media and body image.

I hope that this newsletter provides the opportunity for you to think about your son's exercise and where there are opportunities for it to be fun, social and balanced alongside all of his other interests in life.



Jenelle Hooson

Jenelle is a Registered Provisional Member with NZAC (New Zealand Association of Counsellors).

If you wish to discuss the services the School Counsellor can provide, please see your son's homeroom teacher or Amos Pilgrim:

amos.pilgrim@medbury.school.nz.