“It is important to educate, encourage and motivate children...”

“The Running Room is about building communities.” As readers and contributors to The RunningRoom Magazine, you are aware of, have directly experienced, or continue to be fully supportive of the benefits of developing a healthy active lifestyle through walking and running. Running Room programs, clinics, products, training tips, and inspirational success stories have brought communities together across Canada and United States.

What about our kids as significant family members of our communities?

This is the first in a series of articles entitled “Active Kids” that will provide timely information on the benefits of regular physical activity for our communities of children. All members of your family can become active through participation in developmentally appropriate walk/run opportunities.

It is important to educate, encourage and motivate children to participate in regular physical activities. The habits they establish in childhood carry over into adulthood. People tend to think that just because kids are active that they are also fit—this is not true.

How Healthy Are Our Children?
(from Making the Case for Physical Activity CAHPERD, 1998. Andrea Grantham)

- Two-thirds of children and youth are not active enough to lay a solid foundation for active living. (CFLRI, 1998)
- Forty per cent of youth do not meet average fitness standards. (OMA, 1992)
- Twenty-five per cent of children are overweight and this proportion is increasing. Of these overweight children, 90 per cent of them become obese adults. (CFLRI, 1998)
- Children’s physical activity patterns drop considerably after age 12, with girls generally less active than boys. (Heart & Stroke, 1998)
- Forty per cent of children already face one risk factor for heart disease—reduced fitness due to an inactive lifestyle (Heart & Stroke, 1993); risk factors—high blood pressure, obesity, and high levels of cholesterol.

Poor nutrition and fast-food diets are partly to blame, but a major factor is lack of physical activity. The average Canadian child spends 26 hours each week in front of the television set—these hours are increased by time spent in front of computers and video games, time which would be better spent in vigorous physical play.

The United States Surgeon General’s Report on Physical Activity and Health (1996) encourages “regular participation in moderate activity as an essential component of a healthy lifestyle.” The key finding in this report is that people of all ages can improve the quality of their lives through a lifelong practice of moderate physical activity. A regular, preferably daily, regimen of at least 30 to 35 minutes of moderate physical activity will reduce risks of developing coronary heart disease, hypertension, colon cancer, and diabetes. For those already active, greater health benefits can be achieved by increasing the amount, duration, frequency, or intensity of physical activity.
What Can Parents Do?

Research has shown that even in children as young as six to nine, the leanest and fittest of this age group have parents who are physically active and spend less time watching TV. Researchers are discovering the positive impact provided during those early years, of weight-bearing exercises, such as walking, running, and other activities, on preventing the development of osteoporosis—a gradual thinning and weakening of the bones.

According to the President’s Council on Physical Fitness and Sports, parents need to be educated about the difference between an active child and one who is physically fit. To be physically fit, children need to engage in a variety of enjoyable physical activities both in and out of school. Parents can and need to play a significant role in improving the fitness of their children. Experts agree that the best way to do this is by setting a good example, by being an active role model for your children. Make physical activity a family affair. Exercise together. Plan family activities that include walking, running, hiking, or bicycling. Involve your children in a choice of activities. Rather than using the car, walk to complete errands, to your friends, to a local store. Arrange safe walking routes to school with neighbours, friends, other family members. Ask questions at your children’s school about their physical education program and other active opportunities that may be provided. Volunteer to assist teachers with providing walk/run programs.

Above all, make it fun for your children and yourself through personal challenges and goal-setting, so all of you are encouraged to do it again together.

How Far Should Kids Go?

As you are aware, this issue of The Running Room Magazine is dedicated to the marathon event. You may ask, what are appropriate distances for kids to run? Check www.kidsrunning.com for recommended maximum distances. Kids’ fun runs are often held before or after adult road races; e.g., Running Room 5-Mile Classic. A fun run is a non-competitive event with the goal of finishing, not a winning time or placement. All participants are rewarded with medals, ribbons, t-shirts, or healthy snacks. Race numbers are all No. 1! As well, five or 10 kilometres are not even mentioned in the race category for kids; five kilometres are considered distance runs for high-school age kids. Toddlers in the four-and-under category often run/walk by holding someone’s hand or are encouraged to run/walk from Mom to Dad. Remember, these are maximum distances for most kids:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Fun Run Distance</th>
<th>Race Distance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4 + under</td>
<td>200 meters</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-6 years</td>
<td>400 meters</td>
<td>100 meters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-8 years</td>
<td>800 meters</td>
<td>200 meters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-10 years</td>
<td>1600 meters</td>
<td>400 meters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-12 years</td>
<td>3200 meters</td>
<td>800 meters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13-14 years</td>
<td>5 kilometers</td>
<td>1600 meters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-18 years</td>
<td>5 kilometers</td>
<td>3000 meters</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Why not take your kids to the next marathon? For adults who have experienced these events, words cannot describe the thrill of having family members shout words of encouragement along the route and at the finish line. Kids can join Mom and Dad for the last few metres of an event and then cross the finish line as a family.

Future articles will include information on walk/run tips, games, nutrition, products, goal-setting, and
motivational and inspirational success stories from kids of all ages who experience the joys of being active through running.

Ideas and questions can be directed to my e-mail address: thezabloskis@powersurfr.com

I look forward to hearing from you!