



Physical Activity and Fitness Recommendations for Physical Activity Professionals

College and University Physical Education Council

A Position Paper from the National Association for Sport and Physical Education
Revised 2002

Position Statement: Participation in regular physical activity at a level sufficient to promote health-related physical fitness is an essential behavior for professionals in all fields of physical activity at all levels (this includes coaches, K-12 teachers, physical education and kinesiology faculty in higher education, fitness professionals, athletes, all advocates of physically active lifestyles).

From the beginning of the twentieth century to present times, authorities in our field have stressed the importance of modeling an active lifestyle and physical fitness for professionals in all fields related to physical activity. (Cadinal, 2001; Corbin, 1984; McCloy, 1940; Melville, 1999; Sargeant, 1900; Staffo & Stier, 2000; Wilmore, 1982). A recent survey of physical activity-related professionals and pre-professionals shows that there is continued strong support for this view (Cardinal & Cardinal, 2001). Respondents agreed (4.56 on a 5-point Likert scale) that “role modeling is a powerful teaching tool for HPERD professionals.”

Several key aspects related to modeling in general, and modeling physical activity and fitness in particular, are presented here.

- The behaviors of models can influence the learning of others.
- Participation in regular physical activity is an essential behavior of physical educators and professionals in physical activity as role models as well as for personal health-related wellness.
- Achievement and maintenance of health-related physical fitness (based on accepted criterion-referenced standards) is an appropriate expectation for all professionals in the field of physical activity.

Together these points provide support for the position statement.

The behaviors of models can influence the learning of others.

There is considerable research in diverse domains to support the tenets of social cognitive theory, pointing to the effectiveness of modeling as an important factor in altering human behaviors (Bandura, 1997). Modeling has been shown to be an effective method in working with negative eating behaviors, substance abuse (e.g., alcohol, smoking), and influencing seat belt use (Baranowsky, Perry, & Parcel, 1997). In the psychomotor domain, extensive research has found that modeling can play a major role in the acquisition of motor skills (Ferrari, 1996; Maddalozzo, Stuart, Rose, & Cardinal, 1999; McCullagh, 1993). The use of models can promote competence and feelings of self-confidence and self-efficacy.



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Research on modeling related to a physically active lifestyle indicates that children of physically active parents (parent models) are more likely to be active than children of sedentary parents (Freedson & Evenson, 1991; Moore, Lombardi, White, Campbell, Oliveria & Ellison, 1991). Furthermore, the evidence suggests that children who are active with their parents are likely to be more active than children who do not exercise with their parents (Sallis, 1988a; Sallis, 1988b). Physical education teachers may be less powerful role models than parents, however, teachers are among the more important models for children and youth (Cardinal, 2001). In a study of sixth through eighth grade school children, Gilmer, Speck, Bradley, Harrell, and Belyea (1996) found teachers and coaches to be the most frequently cited non-family member adult role models. Modeling a physically active lifestyle by physical education teachers could have effects on youth similar to those of parents (Melville & Maddalozzo, 1988).

Implication: Models can influence attitudes and behaviors in many ways, including health practices, motor skill acquisition, and the adoption of physical activity patterns. Physical educators, coaches, and all professionals in fitness and physical activity have strong modeling status for many children and youth.

Participation in regular physical activity is an essential behavior of physical educators and other physical activity-related professionals as role models as well as for personal health-related wellness.

Since a primary goal of the profession is to promote an active healthy lifestyle (AAHPERD, AAHPERD vision statement, 1998) for everyone, those involved in professions related to physical activity and fitness should teach and model the most current “established” behaviors and processes for improving health and physical fitness. Presently, those behaviors include participating in a variety of physical activities as noted in the Physical Activity Pyramid (Corbin & Lindsey, 1997; Heyward, 1998). The foundation of this model calls for an accumulation of at least 30 minutes of moderate “lifestyle physical activities” on all or most days of the week. To further guide the selection of physical activities, the model recommends moderate to vigorous aerobic activities 3 to 6 times per week, muscle fitness exercises 2 to 3 times per week, and flexibility or range of motion exercises 3 to 7 times per week. Physical activity professionals should demonstrate a personal understanding and appreciation of the basic physiological training principles such as warm-up, cool-down, gradual overload, progression, and the application of the principles of frequency, intensity, and time as they relate to improving and maintaining



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fitness (Howley & Franks, 1997; AAHPERD, 1999). Modeling these principles in their own fitness endeavors will have a positive influence on those who expect fitness and exercise leaders to be leaders in their profession and to set a positive example for young people and the community. Studies by Cardinal and Sachs (1995, 1996) have found that most people are more likely to adopt moderate intensity “lifestyle physical activities” as opposed to traditional, more structured forms of exercise. This finding suggests that encouragement and modeling of “lifestyle physical activities” by fitness and exercise professionals and physical educators may be especially important to young people and a community that is already inclined to adopt moderate physical activity to improve the quality of life.

In addition to the importance of a physical activity professional’s potential influence on others as a model, engaging in a physically active lifestyle is very important for personal reasons. There are studies that show that participation in organized fitness programs (e.g., corporate fitness programs) results in greater productivity, reduced absenteeism, lower health care costs, and greater job satisfaction among employees (Opatz, 1994). It is reasonable to assume that physical educators and other physical activity professionals who exhibit active lifestyles, similar to those of corporate employees involved in physical activity programs, can expect to experience similar benefits. This was confirmed in one study conducted among 117 schoolteachers (Blair et al., 1984). Those involved in the school district’s experimental wellness program demonstrated significantly greater improvements compared to those not involved in the wellness program on a number of physiological variables, as well as general well-being, level of job satisfaction, and self-concept. Moreover, both self- and principal-ratings of the teachers’ stress management and performance were higher among those in the wellness program compared to those not in the program.

Implications: When children and youth see physical activity professionals participating in accordance with established activity guidelines, applying sound physiological training principles, and actively modeling a physically active lifestyle, it reinforces student learning and will likely lead some to adopt similar activity patterns. The active lifestyle of professionals promotes credibility among parents and colleagues and exemplifies evidence of the value of a physically active lifestyle. Furthermore, the physical activity professionals who exercise regularly provide examples of the positive physiological, health-related effects of an active lifestyle.



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Achievement and maintenance of health-related physical fitness (based on accepted criterion referenced standards) is an appropriate expectation for all professionals in the field of physical activity.

Throughout the years, leaders in our discipline have claimed that physical educators need to maintain acceptable physical fitness levels to be totally effective teachers (Cadinal, 2001; Corbin, 1984; McCloy, 1940; Melville, 1999; Sargeant, 1900; Staffo & Stier, 2000; Wilmore, 1982). Physical educators also need to maintain and exhibit acceptable physical fitness levels to be totally effective fitness role models. Professionals and pre-service professionals are adamant that fitness is important and that the components of health-related fitness, cardio-vascular endurance, muscular endurance, muscular strength, flexibility, and body composition (Howley & Franks, 1997) should be a measure of that fitness level. Cardinal & Cardinal (2001) found that physical education professionals strongly believe, “it is important for health, physical education, recreation, and dance professionals to maintain a healthy body fat percentage.” Those same people strongly concurred (4.4 on a 5-point scale) with the statement “involvement in regular physical activity at a level sufficient to promote health-related physical fitness is a desirable and recommended behavior for physical education teachers.” Such models are worthy of commendation if they are careful to keep long-term health considerations ahead of shorter-term performance ones.

Administrators have also expressed that they value teacher fitness. School administrators have identified lack of teacher fitness as a barrier to implementing quality elementary physical education programs (Sallis, McKenzie, Kolody, & Curtis, 1996). Surveys of individual’s responsible for hiring physical educators have shown that applicants perceived to be unfit have a much-reduced chance of employment (Melville & Cardinal, 1997). Although these studies present a topic that requires further study, it should be noted that there has been little research undertaken to determine whether or not a teacher’s fitness level actually affects student learning and behavior or teacher effectiveness.

Implications: Although the physical activity professional’s physical fitness level is only one of many characteristics which contribute to the learning process, modeling an appropriate fitness level and an active lifestyle needs to be considered a significant factor in encouraging young people, colleagues, and communities to do the same. The level of physical fitness we model may have a powerful influence on youth and our success in the advocacy for our profession to the public.



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Summary

Achieving and maintaining a health-enhancing level of physical fitness is one of the basic standards the National Association for Sport and Physical Education has set for school children and youth and is part of the definition of a physically educated person (NASPE, 1995). All young people (4th through 12th grade) who participate regularly in physical activity should be able to meet health-related criteria (as defined by *FitnessGram*, NASPE, 1995; The Cooper Institute for Aerobic Research, 2000) established for their age and gender. All professionals in our field want physically educated youth to be motivated to participate in a variety of activities and know how to maintain a health-enhancing level of fitness throughout adulthood. By doing so, they will derive well-documented health benefits such as: reduction in cardiovascular and other hypokinetic diseases, the ability to better cope with stress and depression, better cognitive functioning, more energy and work capacity, and lowered injury rates (Greenberg, Dintiman, & Oakes, 1997; AAHPERD, 1999). If working toward meeting acceptable fitness standards is an objective established for students in physical education, then those same goals would seem to be reasonable for all of the professional leaders and educators in the field of fitness and physical activity. Maintaining an appropriate level of health-related fitness will enhance the credibility of physical activity professionals throughout the community, allow for the realization of personal health benefits, and improve job satisfaction. Furthermore, it is likely that instructors, educators, and leaders in physical activity who achieve acceptable levels of cardiovascular and muscular fitness and acceptable levels of body composition will be positioned to serve as motivational role models.

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