A PROGRAM FOR SEDENTARY MIDDLE SCHOOL GIRLS TO INCREASE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY, SELF-ESTEEM, AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

A graduate thesis project in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Counseling,

School Counseling

By

Laurie Harmon

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The graduate thesis project of Laurie Harmon is approved:

________________________________________  Date:
Traci Fellman, MS, PPS

________________________________________  Date:
Marcile Vadell-Strickland, MS, PPS

________________________________________  Date:
Dana Stone, Ph.D, Chair

California State University, Northridge
DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis project to my family: Andy, Jake, Charlie, and Sammi Harmon. Without their patience, support, and encouragement, the completion of my master’s degree and thesis project would have never been possible. Thank you so much, Sammi, for your words of encouragement during my moments of doubt. A special thanks to Andy for taking care of everything at home so I could have the time to complete my journey. Jake, I appreciate your guidance in developing the physical fitness lessons. Charlie, I value your calm reassurance when I just needed someone to listen. You four are the best family that anyone could ask for and I could not have done it without you!

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ABSTRACT

A PROGRAM FOR SEDENTARY MIDDLE SCHOOL GIRLS TO INCREASE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY, SELF-ESTEEM, AND STANDARDIZED TEST SCORES

By

Laurie Harmon

Master of Science in Counseling,

School Counseling

The purpose of this project was to create a physical fitness/self-esteem program for sedentary middle school girls that will improve mental and physical health, while increasing CST scores. Both boys and girls experience confusion and are unsure of themselves during adolescence, but girls struggle with self-esteem issues at a higher rate than boys do. Also, girls show a greater improvement in test scores than boys do when physical fitness time is increased. For these reasons, the program is geared towards adolescent girls. The 10-week program focuses on the current physical and emotional needs of adolescent girls and strives to improve both. The facilitator of the program can choose from a variety of self-esteem lessons that best match the current needs of group members. The physical fitness lessons were created to be fun, while increasing cardiovascular fitness. Also, the cardio lessons can be easily adjusted to meet the fitness level of the participants. At the end of the program participants will have increased their self-concept, fitness level, and in turn, perform better on standardized tests.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

It is now widely acknowledged that daily physical activity has numerous health benefits. Physically fit individuals reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease, diabetes, colon cancer, premature death, and obesity (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010). There are also psychological benefits that physically active people experience including higher self-esteem (McAuley et al., 2000; Maarsh et al., 1995; Gruber, 1986), and less depression, anxiety, and stress (American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM), 2006). Adolescents who are physically active are less likely to adopt risk-taking activities, attempt suicide, or become pregnant, all of which may be connected to better academic success (Brown & Blanton, 2002).

On the other hand, a sedentary lifestyle can lead to obesity, and obesity can lead to many lifelong problems such as cardiovascular disease, Type 2 diabetes, cancer, lung disease, gallbladder disease, kidney disease, and stroke (CDC, 2002). Childhood obesity is on the rise in the United States and the percentage of children who are overweight has doubled in the 6-11 year old range, while it has almost tripled in the 12-19 year old age group (CDC, 2002). Obesity is defined as a Body Mass Index (BMI) greater than 30, and results from more calories consumed than burned off (Reilly, 2007). Some researchers believe that as there is a loss of physical fitness, children become more sedentary, which in turn, causes academic achievement to suffer. Students who are physically active have more academic success than inactive students (Temarche, Robinson, & Graham, 2007).

Even though the benefits of physical activity and the detriments of inactivity are understood, physical education in public schools is viewed as an extra activity that can be cut back or even eliminated. With the implementation of No Child Left Behind (NCLB)
schools have been under constant pressure to increase test scores, and funding and time spent on physical education has decreased (Grissom, 2005). In today’s time of high stakes testing it is important to make informed decisions about how educational money is spent. Is it really in the best interest of the child to decrease time and money spent on physical education. If there is evidence that time spent in physical education has a direct, positive effect on reading and math scores, and improves the overall health of the child, it could be argued that physical education is not a supplemental, but a vital piece in helping our students succeed in school (Grissom, 2005).

Statement of Problem

Research shows that increased aerobic activity on a regular basis can alter and improve the brain’s function (Black et al., 1990; Neeper et al., 1995; Coldcombe & Cramer, 2003), increase self-esteem (Coopersmith, 1967; Gruber, 1986; Ekeland et al., 2009), and improve academic achievement (Vail, 2006; Salis, 1999). As there is a loss of physical fitness, children become more sedentary, which in turn causes academic achievement to suffer. Students who are physically active have more academic success than inactive students (Temarche, Robinson, & Graham, 2007). Sedentary children are not spending enough time engaging in physical activity and need intervention to help them lead a more physically active life. Children need a structured physical fitness group that is based on their needs. The group structure is very important to the success of the program because “groups provide a social environment in which members can learn and practice new behaviors, exchange feedback, and experience support” (Erford, 2007). Within a group setting, students are able to look at themselves and others to gain insights
about dealing with issues in their lives (Erford, 2007). In groups, students will see that they are not alone in their quest to become more physically active.

Once physical activity becomes a part of their lifestyle, students can start to experience the many benefits associated with physical fitness, which will help lead to a healthier, more productive life both in and out of school. Physically active individuals perform better in the classroom (Bize, Johnson, & Plotnikoff; 2007; Brown & Blanton, 2002), and have a greater attention span during class time than sedentary individuals (Taras, 2005). Students who experience more physical activity have lower levels of anxiety and higher levels of self-esteem, which have both been related to improved academic success (Vail, 2006). There are widespread benefits when sedentary youth participate in a structured physical fitness program. The students experience the many health and academic benefits, while the school should see improvement in test scores.

*Purpose of Project*

The purpose of this project is to help sedentary youth lead more physically active lives. The group is intended to increase physical activity, self-esteem, and the test scores of the participants. The students will be introduced to a structured after school fitness program that is catered to the initial fitness level of the participants, and will increase in intensity as each individual’s fitness levels increases. The group will meet three times a week, for one-hour sessions. Students will participate in aerobic games and activities that are encouraging and fun in nature, which will mask the fact that they are exercising because they are having so much fun. Group participants will be introduced to resistance exercises using bands and their own bodies, which will increase their strength. The
program intentionally uses very little equipment because students will be encouraged to continue the exercises at home where they may not have access to fitness equipment.

The second component of this project is to foster and improve the self-esteem of participants. Exercise alone has the ability to improve self-esteem (Vail, 2006), but it is important to directly address issues related to self-esteem with adolescent girls. Every week, half of one session will be designated to discuss issues that are pertinent to the lives of the students, and to discuss the successes and struggles they are encountering with the new fitness program. Participants will also be taught lessons and skills and will engage in activities that are geared to improve self-esteem. This program takes into consideration the very close relationship between physical activity, self-esteem, and academic achievement and is designed to increase each component.

**Terminology**

Academic achievement: Measured on the results of the California Standards Test in math and Language Arts. The CST measures student progress towards proficient and advanced levels of academic performance.

Academic success: Score of proficient or advanced on the CST, or improvement from previous year’s scores; Improvement in GPA and homework completion; Greater class participation.

Inactive: Achieving less than 30 minutes of at least moderate-intensity physical activity a day on five or more days of the week over a seven-day period (Sproston & Primastea, 2002).

Obesity: A Body Mass Index (BMI) greater than 30, results from more calories consumed than burned off (Reilly, 2007).
Psychoeducational groups: Typically conducted in the classroom and usually have less than 10 students. They are structured and content oriented, and help students learn new skills to grow as an individual (Erford, 2007).

Sedentary lifestyle: Not participating in a regular exercise program or not meeting the minimal physical activity recommendations from the U.S. Surgeon General (American College of Sports Medicine, 2006).

Self-esteem: A term used in to reflect a person’s overall emotional evaluation of his or her own worth. It is a judgment of oneself as well as an attitude toward the self. Self-esteem encompasses beliefs (for example, "I am competent," "I am worthy.") (Hewitt, 2009).

Summary

Overall, it is quite evident that leading a physically active lifestyle has many health-related benefits, while individuals who are inactive may experience many health related consequences. It is also very clear that many children are less active today than they were in the past, and this inactivity has lead to a rise in childhood obesity. Inactive children need a physical education intervention program that is tailored to their specific needs. As educators, we are responsible for teaching children and helping them grow as healthy, well-rounded individuals. We cannot just focus on reading and writing, but must look at the many different skills that are necessary for the development and maintenance of a healthy, well-rounded student. Following is a review of the literature that will show the relationship between physical activity, self-esteem, and academic achievement.
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Research since the 1950’s has demonstrated the positive physical benefits of exercise for both adults and children alike. Leading causes of mortality, such as Type 2 diabetes, heart disease, cancer, and obesity, are reduced when a person is involved in regular physical activity (Bize, Johnson, & Plotnikoff, 2007). Physically active adolescents are less likely to attempt suicide, become pregnant, or adopt risk-taking activities, all of which may be connected to better academic success (Brown & Blanton, 2002). It is no surprise that physical activity is also important to the development of the brain. Research has shown that exercise leads to brain growth, including the production of new neurons, increasing the flow of oxygen rich blood, and increased intersynaptic connections (Neeper, Gomez, & Choi, 1995). Also, exercise raises levels of endorphins and norepinephrine, all of which improve mood and reduce stress, and perhaps as a result, improve both academic achievement and self-esteem (Fleshner, 2000).

The connection between physical fitness, improved brain function, and self-esteem should be highly pertinent to educators, and to those who make decisions regarding curriculum and budget allocation (Berg, 2010). The reduction in the amount of time allocated for physical fitness in schools implies that there is not a link between the mind and body and they are seen as two separate entities: the physical side being relegated to a lower status. With budget cuts and pressure to improve test scores, physical education is one of the first areas to be cut back (Grissom, 2005). Cutting physical education suggests a lack of understanding amongst decision makers of the connection between physical activity and improved brain function (Berg, 2010).
For decades, researchers have proclaimed the positive psychosocial benefits of participation in physical activity (Schmalz, Deane, Birch, & Davison, 2007) and have reported a strong relationship between the participation in physical activity and self-esteem (Shephard, 1997). Many children want to be viewed by their peers as competent in physical activity (Cantell, Smythe, & Ahonen, 1994; Shoemaker & Kalverboer, 1994). With that being said, success, or strength, in physical activity may have a strong causal link to self-esteem (Coopersmith, 1997). The development of self-esteem is one of the primary goals of most elementary schools because it is seen as an underlying factor determining student persistence, motivation, and academic achievement (Yawkley, 1980). Yet in the past 15 years, physical education programs have slowly been cut (Tremblay, Pella, & Taylor, 1996), and the self-esteem programs are eroding because there are not enough counselors in schools to run them. Most counselors in California have very large caseloads and literally do not have the time or support to implement such programs.

Since there is evidence that physical activity improves the brain’s ability to function (Neeper, Gomez, & Choi, 1995), educators need to look at the benefits that it can have on a child’s self-esteem and their academic success. In today’s time of high stakes testing it is important to make informed decisions about how educational money is spent, and to look at the relationship between physical activity, self-esteem, and academic achievement.

Stages of Adolescent Development

Erik Erickson explains eight stages of development that a healthy human should pass through from infancy to late adulthood. In each stage, the person faces and
hopefully overcomes, and masters new challenges. Each stage builds on the previous stage, and if the challenge of that stage is not completed, it may reappear as a problem in the future (Crain, 2011). Adolescents (13-19 years of age) fall into the category of Identity versus Confusion. The existential question that is asked is: “Who am I and what can I be?” During this stage of life adolescents are concerned with how they appear to others. This unique stage is a bridge between childhood and adulthood and it is a time of radical change. The body is greatly changing because of puberty, and the mind is growing and able to identify its own intentions in relation to the intentions of others.

The growth and development of every child is determined by two interdependent factors: the environment and heredity. Heredity determines the limits on growth and physique. Environmental factors however, such as exercise and nutrition, also play an important role in the this developmental process (Kirchner, 1992). Scientific research indicates that exercise is necessary for adolescent bone growth. It has been shown that long periods of inactivity cause decalcification of the bones and results in weak and brittle bones. This makes the bones more susceptible to fractures and other injuries (Albinson & Andrews, 1976). Not only are bones growing during adolescence, the brain is also developing. Dr. Jay Giedd found that the prefrontal cortex area of the brain appeared to be growing again just before puberty. He explains that the prefrontal cortex sits just behind the forehead and acts as the boss of the brain. It controls planning, working memory, organization, and modulating mood. As teenagers mature, they can reason better, develop more control over impulses, and make better judgments. “If a teen is doing music, sports, or academics, those are connections that will be hard wired. If
they’re lying on the couch or playing video games or MTV, those are the cells and connections that are going to survive.” (Giedd, 2003).

Dr. Giedd (2003) also found some differences in the brain development of boys and girls. Many health impairments in childhood are more common in boys -- autism, dyslexia, learning disabilities, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), Tourette's syndrome just to name a few. He was wondering if differences between boys' and girls' brains might help explain some of these clinical differences. The male brain is about 10 percent larger than the female brain across all stages of development. This is not to imply that the increased brain size means they are smarter. In fact, the intelligence quotient (IQ) of boys and girls are very similar. But there are differences between boy and girl brains in certain structures and in their developmental path. The basal ganglia, a part of the brain that helps the frontal lobe do executive functioning, are larger in females. Girls may be afforded some protection against these earlier mentioned illnesses because of their larger basal ganglia. Also, he found that girls’ brains mature earlier than boys do (2003).

Adolescence is a confusing time for both girls and boys, but girls seem to be particularly sensitive to the challenges of this stage. For example, in a society where women are to some extent second-class citizens, it may be harder for females to gain a sense of identity (Elkind, 1970). Also, girls are saturated with media images telling them what they should act and look like. We tell them to be happy with their natural beauty, but we define beauty by the unnatural, photoshopped models in. It is no wonder that girls can really struggle to find their true identity during the adolescent stage of development.
Identity versus Confusion is the perfect way to describe adolescents. As they are walking down the hallway at school, you can see them trying to create an identity for themselves. They are trying out new behaviors so they can fit in with their peers. They are not quite sure yet of who they are as a person and how they fit into society, but it will become clearer as they progress through this phase of their life (Gross, 1987). During this confusing time, self-esteem can quickly decline (Gray-Little & Hafdahl, 2000; Seidman, Allen, Aber, Mitchell, & Feinman, 1994), and girls consistently experience lower levels of self-esteem than boys do (Robins, Trzesniewski, Tracy, Gosling, & Potter, 2002).

Educators and parents can aide our children through this confusing period by providing adolescents with programs that will increase their chances of personal and academic success. Researchers have proclaimed that physical fitness programs can have positive psychosocial benefits (Schmalz, Deane, Birch, & Davison, 2007) and have reported a strong relationship between the participation in physical activity and self-esteem (Shephard, 1997). Physical fitness programs can have many positive benefits for children who are trying to successfully maneuver their way through Erickson’s developmental stage of Identity versus Confusion. In particular, girls would greatly benefit from a fitness program because physical fitness plays a different role with males and females in regard to academic success. The relationship between increased physical activity and academic success is greater for girls than it is for boys (Carlson et al., 2008; Eveland-Sayers et al., 2009), and significant results in past studies show evidence that girls can increase academic achievement by increasing physical activity (Carlson et al., 2008; Eveland-Sayers et al., 2009).
Physical Fitness Programs in California Schools

In January of 2005, California adopted the Physical Education Model Content Standards (PEMCS), which raised higher expectations for physical education instruction (California Department of Education, 2005). Physical Education is a course taken during primary and secondary school that encourages psychomotor learning in a play or movement exploration setting (Anderson, 1989). PEMCS provides high-quality, standards-based physical education instruction that will teach students the skills and knowledge to be active and physically fit. Students master fundamental movement skills at an early age, which creates a foundation that facilitates further motor skill acquisition. This gives students the ability to enjoy a lifetime of successful physical activity experiences (CDE, 2005).

Physical fitness can be defined as a state of well-being with low risk of premature health problems, and energy to participate in a variety of physical activities (Howley & Frank). Students also gain confidence and positive attitudes, which are beneficial to participate in physical activities (CDE, 2009). When compared with the 1994 Physical Education Framework, the new PEMCS framework puts a greater emphasis on the time spent in moderate to vigorous physical activity. Also, there is a stronger focus on student learning and the needs of the learner. The standards link the content in physical education with content in science, math, social studies, and English language arts. Some students with special needs will receive accommodations, adaptations, and modifications to help them meet the standards. (CDE, 2009). If followed, the current physical education model should lead most of California’s students to be physically fit and active. Is this really happening. Are our students in California really spending more time in moderate to
vigorous physical activity, and therefore, more physically fit.

With the implementation of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the push for every child in the United States to reach the level of proficient in both math and language arts, funding and time spent on physical education has decreased (Grissom, 2005). The obesity rate for children is in on the rise in the United States. The percentage of children who are overweight has doubled in the 6-11 year old range, while it has almost tripled in the 12-19 year old group (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2002). It is evident that the CDE looked at the alarming statistics of childhood obesity and decided that something needed to be done about it. Thus, the California Department of Education began a series of steps to address the decline in fitness and increase in obesity in the 6.3 million public school children in California. The CDE implemented changes in school exercise programs and nutrition aimed at reducing obesity and improving fitness.

Students master fundamental movement skills at an early age, which creates a foundation that facilitates further motor skill acquisition. Physical Fitness Testing on 8.4 million students (fifth, seventh, and ninth grades) were monitored for body composition, aerobic capacity, flexibility, and upper body, abdominal, and truncal strength using the Cochran-Armitage trend test and multivariable logistic regression models. Researchers found that overall fitness with these students improved from 2003 to 2008 (CDE, 2009).

The CDE is pushing to improve the fitness and health levels of the youth in California. It seems like common sense for schools to follow this lead. It is the perfect time for implementing programs that will increase physical fitness and improve the health of our students.
Physical Fitness and Brain Function

Research on animals suggests that aerobic fitness training, such as running on an exercise wheel, can have a positive influence on cognitive ability (Black, Isaacs, Anderson, Alcantara, & Greenough 1990). Running increases the production of protein in the nerve cells. This protein helps repair cells and enhances growth of neurons and synapses, which in turn improves brain function (Black et al., 1990; Neeper et al., 1995). Despite the positive results with animals, fitness interventions with humans have produced less reliable effects on cognitive tasks. This could be due to the methodology used, the differences in age of the participants, or the differences in length and intensity of the programs. (Colcombe & Kramer, 2003). Colcombe and Kramer conducted a meta-analytic study, in which they quantitatively examined the effect of aerobic fitness training on the cognition of older, sedentary adults. They primarily gathered information from ERIC, MedLine, PsychInfo, and PschchLit on-line databases where they looked at studies conducted from 1966 to 2001, and focused on adults from 55 to 80 years of age. They found, on average, that fitness training did increase the cognitive performance level by 1/2 a standard deviation, regardless of the participant’s characteristics, training method, or type of cognitive test (2003).

Chaddock et al. (2010) conducted a study to see if they could extend the link between physical fitness and improved brain function in pre-adolescent children. Magnetic resonance imaging was used on 49 child subjects to look at the hippocampal volume of higher and lower fit 9 and 10 year olds. Next, they determined if these differences were related to performance on a memory test. Chaddock et al., found that
higher-fit children had greater bilateral hippocampal volumes and performed better on relational memory tasks compared to lower-fit children.

Tuckman and Hinkle (1986) conducted a series of experiments to determine if exercise training alters children’s cognitive function. They used many different cognitive tests to assess children’s mental function both before and after aerobic exercise. They randomly assigned 154 fourth through sixth grade children to either a 12-week aerobic running program (sprinting, relays, and distance runs that increased in intensity over the course of the class) or a standard physical education class (ball games and occasional jogging) that met three times per week, 30 minutes per class. Tuckman and Hinkle found that on the physical tests, children in the aerobic training class were faster in an 800-m run than the children in the control condition. The cognitive tests revealed aerobic exercise did not improve the child’s performance on tests that measured perceptual-motor skills (Bender-Gestalt test) or visual-motor coordination (Maze Tracing Speed Test). Children in the aerobic running program, however, did perform better on cognitive test of creativity (Alternate Uses Test) than the children in the standard exercise program.

Several recent studies that have been conducted on both humans and animals providing evidence that increased aerobic activity on a regular basis can alter and improve the brain’s function (Black et al., 1990; Neeper et al., 1995; Coldcombe & Cramer, 2003; Tuckman & Hinkle, 1986). Physical activity results in an increase in cognitive ability, and higher fit children actually have greater bilateral hippocampal volumes (Chaddock et al., 2010). Our goal as educators should be to foster the development of the complete child. By including the appropriate aerobic exercise
program in our schools, we will be developing students who are stronger both physically and mentally.

Physical Fitness and Self-esteem

Self-esteem is a term used to reflect a person’s overall emotional evaluation of his or her own worth. It is a judgment of oneself as well as an attitude toward the self. Self-esteem encompasses beliefs (for example, "I am competent," "I am worthy.” (Hewitt, 2009). Researchers have reported a strong relationship between physical fitness and self-esteem. (Coopersmith, 1967; Gruber, 1986; Ekeland et al., 2009) The development of self-esteem is one of the primary goals of elementary education because it increases student motivation and success (Tremblay, Inman, & Williams, 2000). Children who participate in physical activities learn to follow the rules, share, and cooperate, and it makes them feel more connected to their school and community. Also, children who are physically active are less likely to become pregnant or attempt suicide-all of which can be linked with improved academic success (Brown & Blanton, 2002; Patel & Luckstead, 2000). Since increased self-esteem provides so many positive benefits to children and adolescents, it is important to look at the research on this subject. Unfortunately, there has been much more research done on older adults rather than adolescents.

McAuley, Bane, & Mihalda (1995), conducted an experiment with 58 sedentary females and 56 sedentary males and had them participate in a five-month exercise program. Prior to the start of the program, an assessment was given on self-efficacy, body image anxiety, and outcome expectations. The same assessment was given following the exercise program. They concluded that long-term participation in an exercise program leads to greater self-efficacy (an individual’s belief that he/she can
organize and execute the task at hand) in older adults.

One study that did look at the relationship between physical activity, self-esteem, and academic achievement in children was conducted by Tremblay, Inman, and Williams in New Brunswick, Canada (2000). The researchers reviewed data from the Elementary School Climate Study, and then sent out a comprehensive survey to the entire population of 6,923 sixth grade students. This survey asked questions about how home and school climate affects children’s behavior, attitude, and school achievement. The researchers found that both males and females who were more physically active had much higher levels of self-esteem. Tremblay et al., also reported that originally females had lower self-esteem than males. Interestingly, the differences between male and female self-esteem disappeared after increasing physical activity. In this same study they found a very small negative relationship between physical activity and academic success (2000).

Two years later, Kirkcaldy, Shephard and Siefen (2002) conducted a similar study with similar results. Approximately 1,000 German adolescents between the ages of 14 and 18 were administered a series of questionnaires assessing self-perception and self-image. They found that adolescents who practiced endurance exercise on a regular basis had a more favorable self-image. Also, those adolescents had lower anxiety-depression scores, and showed less inhibition than their less-active counterparts (2002).

It is very likely that by promoting increased physical fitness, students will start to feel better about their physical performance. This in turn, will reduce body mass and cause individuals to have a positive feeling about their body image. Children who feel better about themselves are likely to receive positive feedback from their peers, which will lead to an improvement in one’s self-image (Kirkcaldy, Shephard, & Siefen, 2002).
It is also quite probable that a physical fitness program created for children or adolescents will have multiple, long lasting, positive effects which include: An increase in an individual’s self-esteem and physical appearance (Tremblay, Inman, & Williams, 2000), a reduction in Type 2 diabetes, heart disease, cancer, and obesity (Bize, Johnson, & Plotnikoff, 2007), less risk-taking activities such as attempting suicide, or becoming pregnant (Brown & Blanton, 2002), and brain growth, including the production of new neurons, increasing the flow of oxygen-rich blood, and increased intersynaptic connections (Neeper, Gomez, & Choi, 1995).

**Gender and Self-Esteem in Adolescence**

Global self-esteem is defined as the individual’s total thoughts and emotions regarding self (Rosenberg, Schooler, & Schoenback, 1989). Developmental studies on adolescence have brought to our attention how important self-esteem is for promoting both physical and mental health, as well as preventing emotional and behavioral problems (DuBois, Burk-Braxton, Swenson, Tevendale, & Hardesty, 2002). Individuals who experience low self-esteem often experience many negative outcomes such as anxiety, depression, substance abuse, and a general dissatisfaction with their lives (Bolognini, Plancherel, Bettschart, & Oliver, 1996). Adolescence is a time of great change. The transition to middle school and the changes that occur to both the body and mind during puberty can have a negative impact on adolescents’ self-esteem and self-worth (Gray-Little & Hafdahl, 2000; Seidman, Allen, Aber, Mitchell, & Feinman, 1994). In fact, self-esteem has been shown to decline for adolescents from sixth through eighth grade (DuBois, Burk-Braxton, Swenson, Tevendale, & Hardesty, 2002; Rhodes, Roffman, Reddy, & Fredriksen, 2004).
Many researchers, parents, and teachers are very concerned about the decline of girls’ self-esteem as they enter adolescence and experience many of life’s changes that occur during this period (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Pipher, 1994). Studies have shown that there is a gender difference in self-esteem during adolescence; many more girls experience low self-esteem than boys do. In fact girls’ self-esteem drops about twice as much as boys does during adolescence (Robins, Trzesniewski, Tracy, Gosling, & Potter, 2002). Low self-esteem can manifest in many ways and has many negative effects on an individual including: Depression and negative mood (Dishman et al., 2006; Mutrie & Biddle, 1995), a sense of helplessness, frustration, inadequacy, or powerlessness; and adopting risk taking activities such as skipping class, shoplifting, or experimenting with tobacco, alcohol, or drugs (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2012).

A large longitudinal evaluation of 4,619 early adolescents in middle school, grade six, seven, and eight, was conducted by Adams, Kuhn, and Rhodes (2006). The schools that participated in this study were all members of a statewide middle school association in Illinois, which serves students from ethnically and socioeconomically diverse backgrounds. The sixth, seventh, and eighth grade student sample was comprised of African American (35.3%), Hispanic (27.6%), and European American (37.1%) students. Of these students, 53% were girls. Self-report surveys were administered to the students by their homeroom teachers, and the results were very interesting. Adams et al., found levels of self-esteem differed significantly by gender across all three grade levels. The boys had higher levels of self-esteem than the girls. The levels of self-esteem also differed between ethnicities. African American adolescents had high and steady self-esteem every year (sixth, seventh, and eighth) while Hispanic adolescents had low yet
stable self-esteem. The European American group started out fairly high in sixth grade, but fell dramatically in seventh grade, and even further in eighth grade. Girls had lower self-esteem than the boys in the European American and Hispanic groups, but not in the African American group (Adams, Kuhn, & Rhodes, 2006).

There are several factors that lead girls to have lower self-esteem during adolescence. Early maturing girls report lower levels of self-esteem than those who mature later (Gure, Ucanok, & Sayil, 2006; Williams & Currie, 2000). Girls have been socialized to believe that body image and appearance are important factors in self-evaluation. In fact, happiness with one’s appearance is the strongest predictor of self-esteem for both female and male adolescents (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Gender socialization within the Hispanic culture encourage boys to express independence and self-reliance in ways that may promote self-esteem. On the other hand, girls in this culture are expected to behave in a nurturing manner in which they may act submissive in order to avoid confrontation (Perilla, 1999).

Self-esteem is an important factor in promoting both mental and physical health, which in turn can have a positive effect on a student’s success in school and in life (DuBois, Burk-Braxton, Swenson, Tevendale, & Hardesty, 2002). During middle school self-esteem can quickly decline (Gray-Little & Hafdahl, 2000; Seidman, Allen, Aber, Mitchell, & Feinman, 1994), and girls consistently experience lower levels of self-esteem than boys do (Robins, Trzesniewski, Tracy, Gosling, & Potter, 2002). It is important for educators to provide research-based programs that will help students (specifically girls) increase self-esteem, which in turn, should increase success and happiness in school and in life.
Physical Fitness Programs and Academic Success

Past research has shown multiple benefits from physical fitness. (Bize, Johnson, & Plotnikoff; 2007; Brown & Blanton, 2002). Students who participate in regular physical activity are much more able to focus and concentrate in the classroom. Physical activity can also reduce stress, anxiety, and depression, all of which can affect school performance (Vail, 2006). The research team of Sallis et al. conducted a study in an affluent suburb in Southern California, to determine the relationship between a health-related school physical fitness program and academic success (as measured by the Metropolitan Achievement Test). 759 fourth grade participants were randomly assigned to one of three conditions: In the specialist group a certified physical education specialist implemented the Sports, Play, and Active Recreation for Kids (SPARK). This is a physical education program designed to promote high levels of physical activity, which will improve physical fitness, promote movement skills, and encourage positive socialization. The next condition was the trained teacher group where classroom teachers were trained in the SPARK program. The final group was the control condition in which the classroom teachers implemented the normal physical education program and they were requested not to begin new physical education activities during the study. The schools did not follow any specific physical education curriculum (1999).

Sallis et al. (1999) found that there was a decline in percentile ranking of all achievement test scores in all experimental conditions, with the exception of one (reading scores in the specialist group). Since the decrease occurred in all conditions, Sallis et al. concluded that the decrease in standardized test scores was not due to the physical education program. This decrease in standardized test scores may have been related to
the high baseline scores (1999). Salis et al., found that spending more time in physical education (twice as much as the control group) did not have harmful effects on standardized test scores. They also found some evidence that a two-year health-related physical education program did have some positive effects on academic achievement, however the significant intervention effects were not improvements in standardized test scores; results indicated a positive trend in the relationship and smaller declines than the control group. Other researchers have found similar results and determined that academic achievement was not significantly related to physical education enrollment (Coe, Pivarnik, Womack, Reeves, & Malina, 2006; Tremblay, Inman, and Williams, 2000; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010).

Some researchers have found a positive relationship between physical education programs and academic success (Vail, 2006; Salis, 1999). In 2007, a study was conducted by Temarche, Robinson, and Graham to determine the effect of increased physical education on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) standardized scores. The MCAS test was administered (Math and Language Arts) to 311 fourth grade students, who presided in two communities in Southeastern Massachusetts area. One of these schools received 28 hours of physical education per year, while the other received fifty six hours per year. They found that the students who received more hours of physical education scored significantly higher on the English/Language Arts portion of the MCAS standardized test than the students who received less. The results were not as promising on the math test. The students who received more hours of physical education did not score significantly higher in math than the students who received fewer hours in physical education (2007).
A longitudinal study conducted by Carlson et al. (2008) found similar positive results. “They used data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 1998 to 1999, and employed a multistage probability design to select a nationally representative sample of kindergarten students.” Carlson et al., looked at the total number of minutes per week spent in physical education classes and compared it to academic achievement in math and in English. They found a small, but significant increase in academic achievement in math and in reading for girls enrolled in more hours of physical education. Higher amounts of physical education were not positively or negatively associated with academic achievement amongst boys in this study (2008).

Researchers have shown multiple benefits that students receive from participating in a structured physical fitness program (Tremblay, Inman, & Williams, 2000). Brain function improves (Black, Isaacs, Anderson, Alcantara, & Greenough 1990), self-esteem increases (Coopersmith, 1967; Gruber, 1986; Ekeland et al., 2009), and students experience increased academic success (Vail, 2006; Salis et al., 1999). In an era of high-stakes standardized test scores, it is important to focus our time and resources on programs that will increase a student’s overall academic achievement, and test scores. Equally important, is investing in programs that will allow our students to live healthier, more fulfilling lives.

*Physical Fitness Tests and Standardized Test Scores*

Other researchers have taken a different approach to looking at the relationship between physical fitness and academic achievement (Grissom, 2005; Chomitz et al., 2009). They have compared the results of fitness tests to standardized test scores in math and reading. Results indicate that there is a strong relationship between overall physical
fitness and academic achievement (Grissom, 2005; CDE, 2002; Castelli, Hillman, Buck, & Erwin, 2007; Chomitz et al., 2009).

Grissom (2005) looked at 884,715 fifth, seventh, and ninth grade California school children enrolled in a public school in 2002. He compared their scores on the FITNESSGRAM, a physical fitness test, to their scores in math and reading on the Stanford Achievement Test (SAT 9). Grissom found that as overall fitness scores improved, mean achievement scores also improved. The California Department of Education (CDE) found similar results in a study they conducted back in 2002 on fifth, seventh, and ninth grade students. The CDE matched the scores from the SAT9 with the results from the state mandated physical fitness test. Their study showed a distinct relationship between academic achievement and physical fitness. They found that higher SAT9 were associated with higher levels of physical fitness, and a consistent, positive relationship exists between overall fitness and academic achievement (CDE, 2002).

Comparing standardized test scores to the number of fitness tests passed is another strategy used by researchers to determine the relationship between physical fitness and academic achievement. Studies have shown that the more fitness tests a child passes, the better the odds of passing a standardized math and reading test (Chomitz et al., 2008; Castelli, Hillman, Buck, & Erwin, 2007; Dwyer et al., 2001). Chomitz et al. conducted a cross-sectional study in 2004 and 2005 to determine the relationship between physical fitness achievement (number of physical fitness tests passed during physical education) and academic achievement (a passing score on the MCAS achievement test in math and reading). They compared the test scores of 1,100 fourth, sixth, and eighth grade
students who lived in the Massachusetts area. They found that as the number of fitness
tests passed increased, so did the odds of passing the MCAS standardized test.

Researchers have shown that the more physically fit a student is, the more likely
they are to pass an academic achievement test (Chomitz et al., 2008; Castelli, Hillman,
Buck, & Erwin, 2007; Dwyer et al., 2001). In a time when physical education programs
are being cut in order for students to receive more academic time, it is important to look
at the research to guide our practice. Physical fitness programs can be used to improve
our academic success and test scores (Chomitz et al., 2008; CDE, 2002; Grissom, 2002).

Gender and the Effect of Physical Fitness on Academic Success

Physical fitness plays a different role with males and females in regard to
academic success. The relationship between increased physical activity and academic
success is greater for girls than it is for boys (Carlson et al., 2008; Eveland-Sayers et al.,
2009). Researchers have explained that girls start at a lower level of fitness than boys do
(Salis et al., 1997). Basically, boys are more physically fit than girls, and thus, the
stimulus that boys receive during physical education may not be enough to produce the
same physiological effect experienced by the girls (Pate et al., 2006). One reason for this
could be that girls have a greater Body Mass Index (BMI) at this age (Datar, A. & Sturm,
R., 2004). Another factor is that gender differences in physical activity beliefs emerge as
children make the transition to middle school. Girls receive less social support for
physical activity, they have fewer active role models, and they are less likely to perceive
the benefits of regular activity (Garcia, Pender, Antonakos, & Ronis, 1998). Because of
these reasons, the mental stimulation experienced during exercise is sufficient to produce
a physiological effect to increase academic achievement in girls, but not sufficient in
boys. This could explain why girls experience more of a benefit from physical activity on academic achievement than boys do (Carlson et al., 2008).

Even though some studies show girls experiencing only a slightly higher relationship between physical fitness and academic achievement, no studies have found the relationship between physical fitness and academic achievement to be higher amongst boys (Eveland-Sayers et al., 2009). Eveland-Sayers et al. conducted a study on 134 third, fourth, and fifth grade children from the Middle Tennessee area. They collected data from the physical education instructors and the results from four physical fitness tests (1-mile run, BMI, muscular fitness, and hamstring flexibility) were compared to the TerraNova standardized achievement test. They found no significant findings evident for boys, but the relationship between 1-mile run times and reading/language arts was stronger in females. There was no correlation between 1-mile run time and mathematics for both boys and girls (2009).

Significant results in past studies show evidence that girls can increase academic achievement by increasing physical activity (Carlson et al., 2008; Eveland-Sayers et al., 2009). Also, previous studies have shown that girls tend to have lower self-esteem throughout childhood and adolescence than boys do (Bolognini, Plancherel, Bettschart, & Oliver, 1996; Quatman & Watson, 2001). Since girls have a lower fitness level and they receive less social support for physical activity (Garcia, Pender, Antonakos, & Ronis, 1998), a physical fitness/self-esteem program tailored for middle school girls could have a strong impact on their success and well-being.
Socio-economic Status and the Effect of Physical Fitness on Academic Success

Another diversity issue that plays a role in the relationship between physical fitness and academic success is the socio-economic status (SES) of an individual. Tremblay et al. concluded that SES was a strong predictor of physical activity levels; as SES increases, physical activity levels increase. They also concluded that SES is a fairly strong predictor of academic success. In their study they found that one standard deviation increase was equal to approximately a 20% increase in academic achievement in reading and math (2000).

Grissom came to a similar conclusion in comparing FITNESSGRAM results to Stanford Achievement Test results. He wanted to see if the relationship between fitness and academic success was consistent across SES. He determined that participation in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) was an indicator for lower SES. NSLP indicates whether or not a student receives free or reduced lunch. Grissom found a large number of non-NSLP recipients (higher SES) achieved higher fitness and academic achievement scores. He concluded that the relationship between physical fitness and academic achievement appeared to be stronger for higher SES (2005). This shows the importance of including physical fitness in every school program so all children can have access to it despite their SES.

Ethnicity and the Effect of Physical Fitness on Academic Achievement

Very few studies have looked at the relationship between physical activity and academic achievement by ethnicity. Of the studies that did look at ethnicity, they mainly focused on how ethnicity affected participation in physical activity rather than the influence ethnicity has on the association between physical activity and academic success.
A longitudinal study conducted in Maryland looked at adolescent development and included 67% African-Americans and 33% European-Americans. It found that participation in extracurricular physical activity is a strong predictor of both higher academic expectations and academic achievement (Fredericks & Eccles, 2006). Furthermore, 8th grade African-American boys who participated in sports were inspired to continue their studies toward college and less likely to act inappropriately in school. Female African-Americans who participated in sports also had higher aspirations to continue their studies toward college and a reduction in absenteeism (Hawkins & Mulkey, 2005).

Higdon (2012) conducted a quantitative study to evaluate the relative contribution of socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and weekly hours of physical education to the academic achievement of Mississippi third and fourth grade students. Data was collected from 109 public elementary schools; representing 30 school districts and 13 counties in the state of Mississippi. Data were based on student records on file with the Mississippi Department of Education (DOE) for the 2008-2009 school year. The outcomes were computed as the percentage of students in each school with English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics test scores reported as either minimum or basic. Higdon found that the percentage of students scoring minimum or basic in ELA and math were strongly correlated with the percentage of non-white students (African-American, Latino, and Asian), and concluded ethnicity to be a significant predictor of academic achievement (2012).

Melnick, Sabo, and Vanfossen conducted the “High School and Beyond” study and found slightly different results than Higdon. They found no significant relationship
between academic achievement and participation in sports in 3,686 Hispanic and African-American students. What they did find was participation in sports was associated with a lower dropout rate. Therefore, sports participation may indirectly contribute to academic achievement by encouraging retention in school (1992).

Researchers have come to different conclusions about the relationship between physical activity, academic achievement, and ethnicity (Higdon, 2012; Melnick, Sabo, & Vanfossen, 1992). However, there is overwhelming data to support the fact that the youth in the United States are not getting enough physical activity (California Health Interview Survey, 2003). The United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity per day for children and adolescents (2001). Many individuals are not meeting these standards, but some groups have particularly low levels of physical activity. Only 11% of Latino males, 18% of African-American males, and 20% of White males meet the guidelines set forth by the CDC (California Health Interview Survey, 2003). California uses the FITNESSGRAM tests to measure the health-related fitness of students. Results show that many students are not passing these tests and there are disparities between ethnicities. For example, in grade five, 34% of White students passed all six tests, while only 23% of African-Americans and 20% of Latinos passed all six standards (California Physical Fitness Report, 2005-06). This data shows that there is a real need to increase the physical activity of all youth. Not only will they receive the many health benefits experienced by physically fit individuals (Bize, Johnson, & Plotnikoff, 2007), they may directly or indirectly increase their academic achievement (Hawkins & Mulkey, 2005; Higdon, 2012; Melnick, Sabo, & Vanfossen, 1992).
Sedentary Children and the Effect of Physical Activity on Academic Success

A sedentary lifestyle can lead to obesity, and obesity can lead to many lifelong problems such as cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, cancer, lung disease, gallbladder disease, kidney disease, and stroke. Childhood obesity is on the rise in the United States and the percentage of children who are overweight has doubled in the 6-11 year old range, while it has almost tripled in the 12-19 year old group (CDC, 2002). Obesity is defined as a Body Mass Index (BMI) greater than 30, which results from more calories consumed than burned off (Reilly, 2007). Some researchers believe that as there is a loss of physical fitness, children become more sedentary, which in turn, may cause academic achievement to suffer. Students who are physically active have more academic success than inactive students (Temarche, Robinson, & Graham, 2007). If this is true, when sedentary youth participate in physical activity, academic achievement should improve (Rennie, Johnson, & Jebb, 2005).

Physically active students receive many benefits, both physical and psychological, that help them perform better in the classroom (Bize, Johnson, & Plotnikoff; 2007; Brown & Blanton, 2002). Students who are physically active have a greater attention span during class time than sedentary individuals (Taras, 2005). Students who experience more physical activity have lower levels of anxiety and higher levels of self-esteem, which have both been related to improved academic success (Vail, 2006). Researchers who have conducted studies on middle and high school students report that individuals at risk of obesity generally earn lower grades than their non-obese peers (Crosnoe & Muller, 2004). Also, girls who are obese tend to score lower on math and reading tests compared to their non-obese peers (Crosnoe & Muller, 2004). Finally,
obese women are less optimistic about their educational futures and are less likely to pursue college or other training after high school. Also, they complete fewer years of schooling (Mellin et al., 2002).

A randomized controlled trial was conducted by Davis et al. (2007) that tested the effect of aerobic training on executive function in overweight children. Participants were considered overweight if they were in the 85th percentile body mass index (BMI). Ninety-four sedentary, overweight children in the Augusta, Georgia area, ranging in age from 7 to 11 years of age, were randomized into one of three groups: Low dose (20 min/day exercise), high dose (40 min/day exercise), or control condition (no exercise). The exercise sessions were held after school and met 5 days per week for 15 weeks. The Cognitive Assessment System (CAS) was administered both before and after the intervention to assess cognitive processes. The children who were in the high dose cohort increased their scores for Planning (a measure of executive function) by about one-third of the standard deviation of standard scores in the normative population. Group differences emerged for the CAS planning scale. Planning scores for the high dose group were significantly higher than those for the control group. The low dose exercise group had a lower post-test score than the high dose exercise group, but it was not statistically different. The results of this study support evidence for the relationship between regular, vigorous exercise and improvement in executive function.

Chronic inactivity amongst children is a problem in the United States, and it has a negative impact on both their physical and cognitive health (CDC, 2002). Children who are sedentary experience lower academic achievement than their physically active peers (Crosnoe & Muller, 2004). Self-esteem is higher for those that are physically active, and
anxiety is lower, which has a direct, positive affect on academic achievement (Vail, 2006). In other words, children who are inactive have poorer health and have lower academic achievement than their active peers. School fitness programs that target this at-risk group of sedentary youth, especially girls, could have a long lasting, positive affect on their physical and cognitive development.

Physical Fitness/Self-Esteem Programs and Group Work

Group counseling is a mode of delivering services to students and it is an integral part of a comprehensive school counseling program (American School Counselor Association, 2003). From a pedagogical and developmental perspective, students often learn best from each other (Goodnough & Lee, 2004); therefore, group settings can be ideal for psychoeducational work. “Groups provide a social environment in which members can learn and practice new behaviors, exchange feedback, and experience support.” (Erford, 2007, p. 183) In a group setting students are able to look at themselves and others to gain insights about dealing with issues in their lives (Erford, 2007). Groups also help individuals to develop tolerance to stress and anxiety, and to find satisfaction in working with others (Corey, M.S., & Corey, G., 2002). There are four types of groups as defined by Association for Specialist in Group Work (ASGW) (2000): task group facilitation, group psychoeducation, group counseling, and group psychotherapy. Psychoeducational groups seem to fit well with a fitness/self-esteem program, so that will be the focus here.

Psychoeducational groups are typically conducted in the classroom and usually have less than 10 students. They are structured and content oriented, and help students learn new skills to grow as an individual (Erford, 2007). When young people face age
and stage developmental tasks together, they gain much more than mastering the targeted skill. Group members develop new resources and coping skills. They also gain an improved sense of well-being through interaction with group members (Erford, 2007). The goal of psychoeducational group work is to “prevent future development of debilitating dysfunctions while strengthening coping skills and self-esteem” (Conyne, 1996). The students will be learning exercise techniques and self-esteem skills that they will be able to carry over into their life outside of school. These skills will help prevent the future development of debilitating dysfunctions, including obesity and low self-esteem.

In order for group work to be successful, there are therapeutic factors that have to be present. Yalom (2005) studied counseling groups and came up with a list of 11 therapeutic factors that are needed for a group to be successful. Several of these factors are pertinent to the success of a middle school fitness/self-esteem group. The group leader needs to create cohesiveness among members and instill hope about their lives, while teaching information about healthy living. Universality is another very important factor, which helps group members realize that they are not alone because others have similar concerns. Also, group members can learn from one another by modeling positive behaviors from other members. Group members need to be able to express feelings that have never been expressed before, and ultimately they need to accept responsibility for their own lives and the decisions they make (Yalom, 2005).

**Summary**

There is no doubt that exercise and physical activity have many life long benefits. People who are physically fit are less likely to die from type 2 diabetes, heart disease,
cancer, or obesity (Bize, Johnson, & Plotnikoff, 2007). Also, people who exercise experience less stress and are less likely to engage in risky behavior (Brown & Blanton, 2002). Research has also shown the connection between physical activity and improved cognitive function. Physical activity increases the production of neurons and increases connections in the brain (Neeper, Gomez, & Choi, 1995). It also leads to greater self-esteem, which can increase motivation in the classroom (Fleshner, 2000).

There has been much research done on the relationship between physical fitness and academic success, yet the results are a bit ambiguous. On the one hand, there seems to be a strong relationship between success on fitness tests and success on academic achievement tests. As overall fitness scores improve, standardized achievement scores improve (Grissom, 2005; CDE, 2002; Castelli, Hillman, Buck, & Erwin, 2007; Chomitz et al., 2009). The relationship between increased physical activity and academic success is less substantial. Some studies have concluded that quality physical education programs do not decrease students’ academic success even though there is reduced time spent on academic subjects (Sallis et al., 1999).

Some studies that looked at diversity issues related to physical fitness and academic achievement concluded that there is a small, yet significant increase in math and reading scores for girls who receive more physical education. Boys, on the other hand, do not seem to be affected by physical activity (Carlson et al., 2008; Eveland-Sayers et al., 2009). It seems that results are greatly affected by the type of study done (the correlational research shows more of a positive relationship than experimental research) and by the gender of the participant. Also, SES appears to have an impact on
both physical activity and academic success. The lower the SES, the lower the fitness and academic achievement scores (Tremblay, Inman, & Williams, 2000; Grissom, 2005).

There seems to be a need for further research on the relationship between physical activity and academic success. Limited research has been conducted that takes into account the current activity level of the participants. Davis et al. (2007) did test the effect of aerobic exercise on executive function in overweight children. Participants in this study had a BMI in the 85th percentile, and researchers found that vigorous exercise improved their cognition. Further research needs to be done that looks at the benefits a quality physical education program (aerobic and strength training) can have on a group of sedentary children.

Self-esteem seems to be closely tied to the relationship between physical fitness and academic success (Tremblay, Inman, & Williams, 2000), so it would be beneficial to include instruction on improved self-esteem. It would be meaningful to measure the difference in pre- and post-standardized test scores and self-esteem. Since girls increase their academic achievement by participating in physical activity more than boys do, and they experience lower self-esteem (Tremblay, Inman, & Williams, 2000), it might be advantageous to gear the program to girls only. The literature suggests that introducing physical activity to students, who are already physically fit, will not produce any significant gains in academic achievement. Just as boys are not affected negatively or positively by the introduction of physical activity (Carlson et al., 2008; Eveland-Sayers et al., 2009), the same might hold true for physically fit individuals. In a time of severe budget cuts and constant pressure to improve standardized test scores, it is important to
look at the research and data to guide the development of programs to increase academic success for our students.
CHAPTER 3: PROJECT AUDIENCE AND IMPLEMENTATION FACTORS

Introduction

This project is a program intended for sedentary female middle school students to help them increase their physical activity, improve self-esteem, and raise academic achievement. The underlying objective will be to change a child’s inactive lifestyle to one of healthy activity, and carry over physical activity into her everyday life. Once physical activity becomes a part of the child’s everyday life, they will receive the healthy benefits related to physically fit individuals: higher self-esteem (McAuley et al., 2000; Gruber, 1986), less stress, anxiety, and depression (American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM), 2006), lower risk of life-threatening diseases (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1996), and better concentration and increased academic success (Vail, 2006).

The group will meet three days per week after school and each session will be one hour in length. Each session will be structured the same way, starting out with a warm up, moving on to an aerobic game or activity, continuing with a strength building exercise, and ending with a cool down. The exercises and games will be different for each day of the week so the participants do not get bored with the activity. The aerobic activities will primarily be in the form of games and contests that foster teamwork. Games tend to mask the fact that an individual is exercising and the children should have fun and look forward to participating.

The final component of the group is to foster and improve the self-esteem of participants. Exercise alone has the ability to improve self-esteem (Vail, 2006), but it is important to directly address issues related to self-esteem. Every week half of one
session will be dedicated to discussion of issues that are pertinent in the lives of the students, and to discuss the successes and hardships they are encountering with the new fitness program. Time will also be spent teaching lessons and skills that are geared to improve self-esteem.

**Development of Project**

This project was developed through extensive research on the relationship between physical activity, self-esteem, and academic success. Various sub-groups, such as gender, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity, were researched to determine the target group for this project. The sources that were used for the literature review include peer reviewed articles and books. Another important resource to this project was the physical education (PE) teachers working at middle schools. Middle school PE teachers have much knowledge about the different games, activities, and exercises successfully used with adolescents to increase strength and aerobic activity, and utilizing their expertise in developing this program improved its likelihood for success. Counselors are another valuable source. The knowledge and real world experience they have in successfully working with adolescent girls helped create lesson plans to develop life skills that will increase self-esteem. Finally, the “Girls Only” toolkit was another resource for lessons plans that promote self-esteem and inspire positive motivation. Ultimately, this project will become a program that targets sedentary girls and provides them with the extra physical activity they need to live healthier lives, increase their self-esteem, and increase their academic success.
**Intended Audience**

My project is intended for sedentary middle school girls and can be implemented in middle schools. Families of inactive youth may find this program useful because many of the physical activities do not need special equipment and can be done in the home environment. The activities in this program are intended to carry over into life outside of school, and should be continued after the completion of the program. The program is also beneficial for individuals of different ages because the activities can be adjusted to the age group. Boys would also benefit from this program because the activities can be adjusted to their fitness level and the self-esteem lessons can be tailored to boys’ issues. Finally, after school programs, such as the Boys and Girls Club, could implement this structured fitness program at their facility to help their inactive members become more physically fit.

**Personal Qualifications**

The person/s implementing this program need some special qualifications. They must have some knowledge or background in physical fitness. It would be beneficial to have experience working with middle school children so the leaders would be familiar with managing behavior and encouraging participation of the pre-adolescents and adolescents in a positive way. Ideally, a middle school physical education teacher would be a great choice to run the fitness part of the program. Another important qualification is counseling or group work experience. A middle school counselor or counseling intern could handle the self-esteem lessons and talks. One person could handle the group on their own since there will only be eight to ten children in each group, but it might be
difficult to find one person with all the qualifications; therefore it is recommended that two people run the group together, each handling their area of expertise.

Environment and Equipment

An athletic field, or gymnasium for colder weather, is needed to implement this group. If these are not available, any big open space will suffice. Different colored pinnies/jerseys will be needed to differentiated teams. Some resistance bands of various sizes are needed for strength training along with two, three, and five-pound weights. Cones and beanbags are needed for the aerobic activities and games. Stability balls, medicine balls, and hoola hoops can be used for strengthening the core. Lastly, an agility ladder can be used for obstacle courses.

Project Outline

I. Physical fitness lessons

Warm-up/stretching  (first 5-10 minutes of each session)

Aerobic activities and games (30-40 minutes of each session)
   Animal Relay Races
   EGGercise
   Parachute Races
   All the Fish in the Sea
   Capture the Flag “Nutty” Version
   Tailball
   Get Your Move On
   Fitness Four Square
   Fitness Around the USA
   Easy Soccer

Strength/Balance Training (10 minutes of each session)
   Lifting very light weights
   Resistance bands
   Stability ball activities
   Medicine ball (very light) activities
   Yoga
Cool down/stretching (final 5-10 minutes of each session)

II. Self-esteem lessons (first half of every third session for the week)

Getting to know you/sponge activities
   “If You Were in My Shoes”
   Two Truths and a Lie
   Question Ball

Self-esteem
   Qualities I Love
   Compliments
   Beauty
   Emotions/Feelings
   Emotions
   Crinkle Heart
   Stress Balloon

Communication
   Ways to Communicate
   Human Knot

Gender
   “Just Because” Stereotypes
   Gender

Healthy Bodies
   Food and Nutrition
   Drugs and Alcohol
CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION

Summary

The purpose of this project was to create a physical fitness/self-esteem program for sedentary middle school girls that will improve mental and physical health, while increasing standardized state test scores. There is strong evidence that exercise and physical activity have many life long benefits. People who are physically fit are less likely to die from type 2 diabetes, heart disease, cancer, or obesity (Bize, Johnson, & Plotnikoff, 2007). Also, people who exercise experience less stress and are less likely to engage in risky behavior (Brown & Blanton, 2002). Research has also shown us the connection between physical activity and improved cognitive function. Physical activity increases the production of neurons and increases connections in the brain (Neeper, Gomez, & Choi, 1995). It also leads to greater self-esteem, which can increase motivation in the classroom (Fleshner, 2000). There seems to be a strong relationship between success on fitness tests and success on academic achievement tests. As overall fitness scores improve, standardized achievement scores improve (Grissom, 2005; CDE, 2002; Castelli, Hillman, Buck, & Erwin, 2007; Chomitz et al., 2009).

We cannot deny that chronic inactivity amongst children is a problem in the United States, and it has a negative impact on both physical and cognitive health (CDC, 2002). Children who are sedentary experience lower academic achievement than their physically active peers (Crosnoe & Muller, 2004). Self-esteem is higher for those that are physically active, and anxiety is lower, which has a direct, positive affect on academic achievement (Vail, 2006). In other words, children who are inactive have poorer health and have lower academic achievement than their active peers. Inactive
children need a physical education intervention program that is tailored to their specific needs. As educators, we are responsible for teaching children and helping them grow as individuals. We cannot just focus on reading and writing, but must look at the many different skills that create healthy, well-rounded students.

Sedentary girls are particularly sensitive to the positive effects of increased physical activity. Significant results in past studies show evidence that girls increase academic achievement by increasing physical activity (Carlson et al., 2008; Eveland-Sayers et al., 2009) Also, previous studies have shown that girls tend to have lower self-esteem throughout childhood and adolescence than boys do (Bolognini, Plancherel, Bettschart, & Oliver, 1996; Quatman & Watson, 2001). Since girls have a lower fitness level and they receive less social support for physical activity (Garcia, Pender, Antonakos, & Ronis, 1998), a physical fitness/self-esteem program tailored for middle school girls could have a long lasting, positive affect on their physical and cognitive development.

Discussion

This program is focused on adolescent girls exclusively for a few reasons. First, research shows that girls benefit more than boys do, both academically and emotionally, from increased physical activity. Also, I wanted girls to be able to express themselves freely without worrying what boys may think. For example, girls might be hesitant to talk about body image issues when boys are present. Also, adolescent girls might feel uncomfortable discussing the reasons behind their low self-esteem because they want to appear self-confident to the opposite sex. Finally, I did not want the girls to feel self-conscious or embarrassed about exercising in front of boys. A heterogeneous group
might compromise the effectiveness of the program because girls could limit what they say and what they do. I do feel that there is a need for a program geared exclusively towards adolescent boys. Many boys who lead sedentary lifestyles and struggle with low self-esteem would greatly benefit from a physical fitness/self-esteem program. Without girls in their group, the young men would also feel more comfortable to be themselves, both physically and emotionally.

Although this program was created for adolescent girls, all ages could experience the positive effects of a physical fitness/self-esteem program. It would be great for girls in elementary school to build up their self-esteem before they enter Erickson’s uncertain stage of adolescence known as Identity versus Confusion. Equipped with greater self-esteem entering middle school, girls might not be as concerned with how they appear to others, and they would be better prepared to deal with the unreal media images that they are bombarded with on a daily basis. A program for younger girls could be seen as preventative rather than reactive.

Throughout the creation of this program, I had difficulty limiting the topics I would research. I wanted to focus on nutrition because I feel that it is closely related to physical and mental health. However, I realized that I had little control over the diet of my group members and I needed to focus on tangibles that I could control.

**Future Work**

There seems to be a need for further research on the relationship between physical activity and academic success. Limited research has been conducted that takes into account the current activity level of the participants. Davis et al. (2007) did test the effect of aerobic exercise on executive function in overweight children. Participants in this
study had a BMI in the 85th percentile, and researchers found that vigorous exercise improved their cognition. Further research needs to be done that looks at the benefits a quality physical education program (aerobic and strength training) could have on a group of sedentary children.
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Healthy Body,

Healthy Mind,

Healthy You!

A PROGRAM FOR SEDENTARY MIDDLE SCHOOL GIRLS TO INCREASE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY, SELF-ESTEEM, AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT
Created By: Laurie Harmon
APPENDIX
Healthy Body, Healthy Mind, Healthy You

Introduction

This is a program intended for sedentary female middle school students to help them increase their physical activity, improve self-esteem, and raise academic achievement. The underlying objective is to change a child’s inactive lifestyle to one of healthy activity (3x per week), and carry over physical activity into their everyday life. A physically active lifestyle can lead to improvement in self-esteem, and this program aims to actively improve self-esteem through lessons that are geared towards improving self-concept. It is my belief that a healthy body and healthy mind are interwoven to the degree that you cannot improve one without improving the other. This program directly teaches both physical fitness and self-esteem lessons to a group of middle school girls that will improve fitness level and self-concept; hence a healthy body, a healthy mind, and a healthy you.

Research shows that increased aerobic activity on a regular basis can alter and improve the brain’s function (Black et al., 1990; Neeper et al., 1995; Coldcombe & Cramer, 2003; Tuckman & Hinkle, 1986), increase self-esteem (Coopersmith, 1967; Gruber, 1986; Ekeland et al., 2009), and improve academic achievement (Vail, 2006; Salis, 1999). As there is a loss of physical fitness, children become more sedentary, which in turn, causes a decrease in academic achievement. Students who are physically active have more academic success than inactive students (Temarche, Robinson, & Graham, 2007). Sedentary children are not engaging in the 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend (2001). They would benefit from a structured physical fitness group that would help them lead a more physically active life.

Once physical activity becomes a part of their lifestyle, students can start to experience the many benefits associated with physical fitness, which will help lead to a healthier, more productive life both in and out of school. Physically active individuals perform better in the classroom (Bize, Johnson, & Plotnikoff; 2007; Brown & Blanton, 2002), and have a greater attention span during class time than their sedentary peers (Taras, 2005). Students who experience more physical activity have lower levels of anxiety and higher levels of self-esteem, which have both been related to improved academic success (Vail, 2006). Both students and schools benefit when sedentary youth participate in a structured physical fitness/self-esteem program. The students receive many mental and physical benefits, while the school will see improvement in test scores (Grissom, 2005).

Target Population

This program is intended for inactive (less than 30 minutes of physical activity daily) middle school girls and can be implemented at the school. This program is focused on adolescent girls, exclusively, for a few reasons. First, research shows that girls benefit more than boys do, both academically and emotionally, from increased physical activity.
(Carlson et al., 2008; Eveland-Sayers et al., 2009). Also, I want girls to be able to express themselves freely during the self-esteem lessons without worrying what boys think. Finally, I did not want girls to feel self-conscious or embarrassed about exercising in front of boys. A heterogeneous group might compromise the effectiveness of the program because girls could limit what they say and what they do.

A questionnaire will be sent out to all girls at the school regarding their current fitness level. They will be asked, “How many hours of physical activity do you get per week outside of school?” The girls who get less than three hours per week of physical activity will be put on a sedentary list. Another e-mail will be sent out to all staff members asking for names of individual girls who would benefit from lessons on self-esteem. Included in this e-mail are the signs to look for of children with low self-esteem. Girls who show up on both lists will be interviewed by the group leader and screened for compatibility and desire to be in the final group.

It is very important to ask girls about any physical limitations they may have since this is a fitness program. If the limitations are too great, for example severe asthma or a physical injury that would limit participation, they will not get the full benefit of participating in this group. Minor limitations can be accommodated for since most aerobic activities in this program can be adjusted to the level of the participant.

I do feel that there is a need for a program geared exclusively towards adolescent boys. Many boys who lead sedentary lifestyles and struggle with low self-esteem would greatly benefit from a physical fitness/self-esteem program. Without girls in their group, the young men would also feel more comfortable to be themselves both physically and emotionally.

Although this program was created for adolescent girls, all ages could experience the positive effects of a physical fitness/self-esteem program. It would be great for girls in elementary school to build up their self-esteem before they enter Erickson’s uncertain stage of Identity vs. Confusion. Entering middle school equipped with greater self-esteem, girls might not be as concerned with how they appear to others, and they would be better prepared to deal with the unreal media images that they are bombarded with on a daily basis. A program for younger girls could be seen as preventative, rather than reactive.

Families of inactive youth may find this program useful because many of the physical activities do not need special equipment and can be done in the home. The activities in this program are intended to carry over into life outside of school, and should be continued after the completion of the program. The program is also beneficial for individuals of different ages because the activities can be adjusted to the age group. Boys would also benefit from this program because the activities can be adjusted to their fitness level and the self-esteem lessons can be tailored to boys’ issues. Finally, after school programs, such as Boys and Girls Club, could implement this structured fitness program at their facility to help their inactive members become more physically fit.

**Group Type**

Students often learn best from each other (Goodnough & Lee, 2004). Therefore, group settings can be ideal for psychoeducational work. “Groups provide a social environment in which members can learn and practice new behaviors, exchange
feedback, and experience support” (Erford, 2007, p. 183). In a group setting students are able to look at themselves and others to gain insights about dealing with issues in their lives (Erford, 2007). Groups also help individuals to develop tolerance to stress and anxiety, and to find satisfaction in working with others (Corey & Corey, 2006).

Psychoeducation groups are typically conducted in the classroom and usually have fewer than ten students. They are structured and content oriented, and help students learn new skills to grow as individuals (Erford, 2007). When young people face age and stage development tasks together, they gain much more than mastering the targeted skill. Group members develop new resources and coping skills. They also gain an improved sense of well-being through interaction with group members (Erford, 2007). The goal of a psychoeducational group work is to “prevent future development of debilitating dysfunctions while strengthening coping skills and self-esteem” (Conyne, 1996). The students will be learning exercise techniques and self-esteem skills that they will be able to carry over into their life outside of school. These skills will help prevent the future development of obesity and low self-esteem.

This program will have a closed group with 10-12 female members. They will meet three days per week after school, for one hour each session. If the girls have more than two unexcused absences, they will be asked to leave the group. Commitment is an important part of this program and the girls will be aware of this requirement from the start. The first two sessions of the week will be strictly physical fitness lessons. While the third session of the week will be run differently: Half of the time will be allotted to a fitness lesson while the other half will be a self-esteem lesson. Each fitness session will be structured the same way, starting out with a warm up, moving on to an aerobic game or activity, continuing with a balance/core-building exercise, and ending with a cool down. The exercises and games will be different for each day of the week to minimize the possibility of participants becoming bored. The aerobic activities will primarily be in the form of games and contests that foster teamwork. Games tend to mask the fact that an individual is exercising and the children will have fun and look forward to participating.

The final component of the group is to foster and improve participants’ self-esteem. Exercise alone has the ability to improve self-esteem (Vail, 2006), but this program speaks to directly address issues related to self-esteem. Every week, half of the final session will be dedicated for discussion of issues that are pertinent in the lives of the students, and to discuss the successes and hardships they are encountering with the new fitness program. Time will also be spent teaching lessons and skills that are geared to improve self-esteem.

There are two separate locations that are needed to run this program. First, a field, playground, (backyard if doing program at home), or gym will work fine for all fitness activities. Next, it would be best if the self-esteem lessons were conducted in a classroom or similar type room for privacy and comfort. Ideally, this could take place at a school where both locations are easily accessible. A Boys and Girls Club or other after-school program could also run this program as long as they have enough open space for the physical fitness activities and a private room for the self-esteem lessons.
General Overview

This program was made with flexibility in mind, and it is meant to meet each participant at their physical and emotional level. Not everyone is at the same fitness or emotional level and that is why the program has a mix and match format. The first two sessions of the week are solely physical fitness lessons. The facilitator will choose from the various lesson plans included in this program: one warm-up, one aerobic lesson/game, one balance/core activity, and a cool down. Together, these four components will make up the aerobic lessons for the first two sessions of every week. Activities will be chosen according to the fitness level of the participants.

The third session of every week is divided equally between a focus on fitness and self-esteem. The first half of the session will be a self-esteem lesson and the facilitator will choose from the many lessons included in this program. For the first week or two of the program, the facilitator should choose a “Getting to Know You” activity. After that, the self-esteem lessons can be taught in any order, depending on the needs that arise in the group. The second half of these sessions will be dedicated to fitness lessons. Since this is half the time of the usual fitness lesson, the facilitator can just do a warm-up and balance/core activity, or they can choose to do a warm-up with a shortened aerobic activity/game.

As is true with every group, the issue of confidentiality should be discussed during the first session. The participants will discuss the importance of keeping what other group members share private: What is said in the group, remains in the group. The group leader should also inform students that everything they say will be confidential unless they express that someone is hurting them, they plan to hurt themselves, or they plan on hurting another person. In this case, the group leader has a legal obligation to inform the appropriate person.
Sample Outline for One Week

Day 1

Group members will meet on the field and sign in on the attendance sheet.

**Warm-up:** The group leader will guide students in a general warm-up such as skipping around the field. When finished, the students will gather in a circle and the group leader will guide students in stretching.

**Aerobic Activities/Games Lessons:** Animal Relay Races

**Balance/Core Activity:** Balance push-up

**Cool Down:** The group leader will guide students in a cool down activity such as lightly jogging around the field, followed by stretching.

**Closing:** Every exercise session will end with a brief discussion of what students liked best/least about the lesson. They will also talk about how it feels to be active.

Day 2

Group members will meet on the field and sign in on the attendance sheet.

**Warm-up:** The group leader will guide students in a general warm-up such as jumping jacks. When finished, the students will gather in a circle and the group leader will guide students in stretching.

**Aerobic Activities/Games Lessons:** All the Fish in the Sea

**Balance/Core Activity:** Hand-to-Foot Ball Pass

**Cool Down:** The group leader will guide students in a cool down activity such as speed walking around the field. The lesson will end with stretching.

**Closing:** Every exercise session will end with a brief discussion of what students liked best/least about the lesson. They will also talk about how it feels to be moving and active.

Day 3

Group members will meet in a designated classroom for the self-esteem lesson and they will sign in on the attendance sheet.

**Self-Esteem Lesson:** Question Ball
Group members will walk outside for exercise lesson (this will be a shortened lesson).  
**Aerobic Activities/Games Lessons:** Easy Soccer

**Closing:** The students will discuss what they learned in their self-esteem lesson, and they will also talk about how exercise makes them feel on the inside. Discuss any relationship group members see or feel between physical fitness and self-esteem.
Physical Fitness: Aerobic Activities/Games Lessons:

Animal Relay Races
EGGercise
Parachute Races
All the Fish in the Sea
Capture the Flag “Nutty” Version
Tailball
Get Your Move On
Fitness Four Square
Fitness Around the USA
Easy Soccer

Physical Fitness: Warm-up/Cool Down Activities:
Stretch 1: Chest Stretch
Stretch 2: Shoulder Stretch
Stretch 3: Triceps Stretch
Stretch 4: Outer-Hip-and-Low-Back-Stretch
Stretch 5: Abdominal Stretch
Stretch 6: Low Back Stretch
Stretch 7: Hip Flexor Stretch
Stretch 8: Quadriceps Stretch
Stretch 9: Modified Hurdler Stretch
Stretch 10: Butterfly Stretch

Physical Fitness: Balance/Core Activities:
Balance Push-Up
Bridge
Bridge to Hamstring Curl
Hand-to-Foot
Hand-to-Foot Ball Pass
Balance Plank
**Physical Fitness: Aerobic Activities/Games Lessons: Animal Relay Races**

**OBJECTIVE:** Promote increased fitness and teamwork

**MATERIALS:** Cones and a whistle

**TIME:** 30 minutes

**PROCEDURE:**

1. Divide group members into three equal teams.
2. Set up four cones. Two cones, approximately 25 feet apart, will represent the starting/finish line. The other two cones should be parallel to the first set, approximately 25 yards away, to represent the line that needs to be crossed before they return.
3. Explain rules for a relay race: One group member goes at a time; The next group member cannot go until teammate touches their hand; As soon as a teammate has completed her turn and crossed the line, she has to sit down.
4. Tell participants that this is like a normal relay race except that they will have to walk, crawl, or fly like the animal you call out (ex. bears walk on all fours while growling, bunnies hop down the field, an eagle acts like they are soaring down the field while flapping their wings). Choose one animal per race so that everyone moves like the same animal during that race.
5. The team that has all members cross the finish line first will be the winner of that race.
6. You can do this as many times as you like using a different animal each time.

**EVALUATION:** Did group members actively participate in the relay races? Students will measure heart rate, by finding pulse on wrist, before and after the activity to determine if the heart rate did increase during the activity?

**EXTENSION:** Instead of animals, use different sports (ex. dribble like a basketball player, pretend you are a racecar driver, run down the field like a football player).
Physical Fitness: Aerobic Activities/Games Lessons: Eggercise (adapted from pecentral.org)

OBJECTIVE: Promote increased fitness and effective teamwork

MATERIALS: 1 scooter for every 3 students, large bucket, plastic Easter eggs with “Eggercise tags” on the inside of them, Easter baskets or small buckets for each team

TIME: 30 minutes

PROCEDURE:
1. Students will be divided into groups with 3-4 students in each.
2. Each group should have one scooter.
3. In the center of the gym place a large bucket filled with plastic eggs.
4. Inside of the eggs should be “Eggercise” tags such as “do five push-ups” “10 jumping jacks” “hop on one foot 20 times”
5. Around the center where the large bucket is, place a smaller basket for each team. This is where each team will place their eggs once they have completed the exercise.
6. When the facilitator says go, one member from each team should ride the scooter to the center big bucket and choose one of the eggs out of it.
7. She should perform the exercise on the “Eggercise” tag. Once she has completed the exercise, she should put the egg in the little basket and return to her team.
8. The next person on the team should follow the same procedure.
9. The first team to have all members complete their “Eggercise” is the winner of that round.
10. Play as many rounds as you want or as time allows.

NOTE: Vary the difficulty level of the exercises depending on the fitness level of participants.

EVALUATION: Did the students perform the exercises on the tags in the proper way? Were they actively involved and did they encourage team members?

EXTENSION: “Eggercise” tags can be placed in each corner of the gym and each team member must perform exercises from each corner before they return to their teammates. This can be done once fitness level of group has increased.
Physical Fitness: Aerobic Activities/Games Lessons: Parachute Races (adapted from Hot Chalk Lesson Plans)

OBJECTIVE: Promote increased muscular strength and endurance. Promote encouragement.

MATERIALS: 4 small parachutes, a whistle, and an expanse of field or track

TIME: 20-30 minutes

PROCEDURE:
1. Participants will be divided into two groups
2. The facilitator will blow a whistle to signal the start of the race.
3. While wearing a parachute in the appropriate size, two students race in a 50-yard dash against each other.
4. Two other students will also have parachutes on because they will be next in line to race.
5. The children who are not racing will cheer the others on,
6. Continue until every child has had a chance to race against each other

NOTE: It takes about 10 yards for the parachute to open

EVALUATION: Were students able to run the entire 50 yards with the extra resistance? Did they encourage each other?

EXTENSION: The participants can do other races such as skipping and galloping.
**Physical Fitness: Aerobic Activities/Games Lessons: All the Fish in the Sea** (adapted from Hot Chalk Lesson Plans)

**OBJECTIVE:** Promote increased fitness and teamwork

**MATERIALS:** Cones, a whistle, and open space

**TIME:** 30 minutes

**PROCEDURE:**
1. As a group, discuss different animals in the ocean
2. Decide on two animals and divide the participants into these two animal groups.
3. Use four cones to mark off boundaries of playing field.
4. Explain that when the animal group is called, participants will have to cross the ocean. However, they need to be listening for how to cross the ocean (ex. all of the sharks have to hop across the ocean; all of the dolphins have to skip across the ocean).
5. If you call out all of the fish in the sea, everyone needs to cross at the same time.
6. Finally, explain how there are other living things in the sea such as plants (ex. seaweed, coral, amoebas, etc.). You (the facilitator) have become one of these plants. When they cross the ocean, they have to make sure not to get caught by or stuck in your plant.
7. The plants have to stay in a 10-foot wide area in the center of the playing field that runs the length of the playing area. The “plants” can run back and forth across this area, but they may not leave it.
8. If a student does get caught (tagged by you) they become a plant also and help catch other animals.
9. Keep playing until only one animal remains.
10. Play as many times as the students want.

**EVALUATION:** Were students engaged in the game and did they move and keep active the entire time? Did they do the movement that was called out for their animal?

**EXTENSION:** The same game can be played, but you can use different groups of animals (ex. forest animals, desert animals, arctic animals).
Physical Fitness: Aerobic Activities/Games Lessons: Capture the Flag “Nutty” Version (adapted from Hot Chalk Lesson Plans)

OBJECTIVE: Promote increased aerobic fitness by improving dodging and running skills. Students will practice moving safely through general space.

MATERIALS: Cones, a whistle, 3 hula hoops, 9 or 11 beanbags, jerseys/pinneys for two teams, and open space

TIME: 30 minutes

PROCEDURE:
1. This game is the “nutty” version of Capture the Flag. Two teams of Squirrels are competing for the same pile of nuts to store in their “holes.”
2. The hawks are trying to protect the nuts for a round of play.
3. Use four cones to mark off playing field.
4. Set up, in the gym or outside, one hula hoop in the center of the court; place one hula-hoop at each end of the court.
5. Put all the beanbags (“nuts”) in the center hula-hoop: This is the Hawk’s nest.
6. The other two hula-hoops are the Squirrels’ holes.
7. There are three teams in this game: Choose 4 students to be the Hawks; the rest of the group members are divided evenly into two teams of Squirrels.
8. Each Squirrel team will wear a different color jersey/pinney.
9. The object of this game is for the Squirrel teams to gather nuts and put them in their holes. The object for the Hawks is to keep the nuts in their nest for the duration of the round (5-10 minutes).
10. There are no safe areas. The Hawks protect their nest by tagging Squirrels. When Squirrel is tagged he is frozen until a teammate tags him. If a Squirrel has a nut when he is tagged, The Hawk takes it back to the nest.
11. If all the nuts are taken from the Hawks’ nest before the round is over, the team with the most nuts in their hole wins the game.
12. Play as many rounds as you like.

NOTE: Should probably start out with 5-minute rounds until the students build up their endurance.

EVALUATION: Do students move swiftly and safely around the court? Did students keep moving for the entire round?

EXTENSION: The Squirrels can take from each others’ holes, and Squirrels can tag and freeze opponent Squirrels who have crossed the half court line.
Physical Fitness: Aerobic Activities/Games Lessons: Tailball (adapted from Hot Chalk Lesson Plans)

**OBJECTIVE:** Promote increased aerobic fitness and cooperation through scoring goals and throwing a tennis ball (with a tail attached) through a basketball hoop.

**MATERIALS:** Outside or inside basketball court and a tailball (tie a 1 foot/30 cm long ribbon to a washer which is then inserted through a small incision made into the tennis ball)

**TIME:** 30 minutes

**PROCEDURE:**
1. This game is played on either an outside or inside basketball court.
2. Divide the group into two teams.
3. Have one person from each team come to the center for the tip off (as done in basketball). The facilitator throws the ball up in the middle for the tip off.
4. There is no running with the tailball. Team members pass the tailball to other team members to move the ball. The tailball can be caught by catching any part of the ball (the actual tennis ball, or the tail), but it can only be passed by using the tail.
5. When the team gets the tailball down to their own basket, they try and score a goal. When they are shooting a goal, they do not have to throw it by the tail, they can throw it by the actual tennis ball.
6. If the ball is dropped or hits the ground, the opposing team gets the ball.
7. The team with the most points at the end of the game wins.
8. You could break the game into quarters like they do in real basketball.

**NOTE:** Time period for each quarter can be smaller when fitness level is low. As fitness level increases, increase the amount of time played. Also, make sure to have participants drink water in between each quarter.

**EVALUATION:** Are group members actively running and involved in the game? Are they communicating with each other to pass the ball and work as a team?

**EXTENSION:** Set a minimum amount of passes between teammates before a goal is scored, or set time limits on how long each person can keep the ball before they have to pass it.
Physical Fitness: Aerobic Activities/Games Lessons: Get Your Move On (adapted from pecentral.org)

**OBJECTIVE:** Improve cardiovascular endurance as well as cooperation

**MATERIALS:** 4 buckets, 3 sets of team pinnies, 500 or so coins or popsicle sticks

**TIME:** 30 minutes

**PROCEDURE:**
1. Divide participants into 4 teams. Give three teams different color pinnies and the other is in their regular clothing.
2. Each team has a bucket that is marked with their team name on it. The buckets are placed on the other side of the gym.
3. On the facilitator’s command (whistle), all students run to the other end of the gym and pick up one coin/popsicle stick. They run back to the opposite side of the gym (with the team buckets) and drop the stick in any team’s bucket except their own.
4. Students keep doing this until all the popsicle sticks are gone. The faster they run, the more sticks they will be able to put in other buckets.
5. Participants should use strategy to recognize what team is ahead and then try to fill their bucket.
6. The team with the fewest sticks in their bucket wins the game.

**NOTE:** Remind students to pay attention where they are running so they do not run into anyone.

**EVALUATION:** Did students work as a team and strategize? Were team members running the entire time?

**EXTENSION:** Before students can place the popsicle stick in another’s bucket, they have to do five jumping jacks (or any other exercise).
**Physical Fitness: Aerobic Activities/Games Lessons: Fitness Four Square** (adapted from pecentral.org)

**OBJECTIVE:** Improve fitness level, strength, and flexibility through various exercises

**MATERIALS:** Four square balls, 3 or 4 four square courts, one six sided die per court, dry erase boards, mats

**TIME:** 25 minutes

**PROCEDURE:**
1. Have students come up with 6 exercises and write them on the dry erase board (number them from 1 to 6).
2. Review Four Square Rules
3. Before each serve is allowed, the champion square (square #1) rolls the die. The students in each square must perform the exercise on the list that corresponds with the number on the die.
4. Once this is completed, the server may serve.
5. Once someone is declared “out” that student rotates to the next square.
6. The student in line enters the court and the die is rolled again.

**EVALUATION:** Are students able to perform all of the exercises? Are students able to tell which body part is being worked with each different exercise?

**EXTENSION:** Have students at each different Four Square court create their own list of exercises.
**Physical Fitness: Aerobic Activities/Games Lessons: Fitness Around the USA**
(adapted from pecentral.org)

**OBJECTIVE:** Improve fitness level, strength, and flexibility while practicing the geography of the United States of America

**MATERIALS:** 20 cones, station signs, 2 jump ropes, chair, pull-up bar, station cards

**TIME:** 30 minutes

**PROCEDURE:**
1. This is a station-based activity and each station has a different exercise.
2. Each station has sign labeled with the city name, exercise, and direction for the next city.
3. Tape the station signs to the cones and set up according to a map of the USA.
4. Make sure students know which side is the Atlantic Ocean and which is the Pacific Ocean. This will help with directions.
5. Position each student at a different station (State). This will be her home city.
6. Each student is to perform the activity listed on each station card. There is no time limit.
7. The student is finished when she has traveled “around the world” and she makes it back to her home city.

The station signs are as follows:
Chicago: 25 Jumping Jacks
Move on to Phoenix

Phoenix: Make up your own exercise to Atlanta and back
Move on to Boston

Boston: 10 push-ups
Move on to Houston

Houston: Jump rope to Seattle and back
Move on to Nashville

Nashville: 20 crunches
Move on to Miami

Miami: Crabwalk while saying the Pledge of Allegiance
Move on to San Francisco

San Francisco: Skip around the country 2 times
Move on to Philadelphia
Philadelphia:  10 chair dips  
Move on to Seattle

Seattle:  Run in place for 30 seconds  
Move on to Bismark

Bismark:  High knees to New York and back  
Move on to Washington D.C.

Washington D.C.:  Make up your own exercise to San Francisco and back  
Move on to Las Vegas

Las Vegas:  Do the “Macarena” 5x  
Move on to Boise

Boise:  Side skip around the country 2x  
Move on to Myrtle Beach

Myrtle Beach:  Hop up and down on one foot 25x, then the other foot 25x  
Move on to Omaha

Omaha:  Hop up and down on two feet 50x  
Move on to New York

New York:  20 arm circles; Reverse 20 arm circles  
Move on to Chicago

NOTE:  If students cannot complete all of the exercises at each station, have them complete what they can then move on to the next station.

EVALUATION:  Were students able to perform exercises at each station?  Could they make it through the entire circuit?

EXTENSION:  You can increase the number of stations (States).  Have the students work in teams and the entire team can only move on to the next state when everyone on their team has completed all of the exercises.  If one person cannot complete the task, someone on their team can complete it for them.  The first team to make it through all of the states, wins.
Physical Fitness: Aerobic Activities/Games Lessons: Simple Soccer

OBJECTIVE: Improve cardiovascular fitness by running during a soccer game. Learn cooperation by passing the ball to others on your team.

MATERIALS: Fitness ball, 10 cones, pinnies for one team.

TIME: 30 minutes

PROCEDURE:
1. Divide the group into two teams.
2. With cones, mark off the playing field and mark off the two goals.
3. There are no goalies in this soccer game.
4. The objective is to kick the fitness ball in your goal when your team has the ball, and steal the fitness ball when the other team has the ball.
5. Play in five-minute intervals and take a water break every five minutes. This is a lot of running and they will need the break.
6. Discuss passing the ball to better chances of making a goal.
7. The game is over after 5 sessions and the team who has scored more goals, wins.

NOTE: Discuss safety and how you may never run into another person to steal the ball. Also, make sure they know they cannot use their hands.

EVALUATION: Were students able to continue running for the entire 5-minute interval? Did students cooperate and pass the ball to one another?

EXTENSION: During timeouts, students perform simple exercises.
Physical Fitness: Warm-up/Cool Down Activities:

A general warm up/cool down consists of light physical exercise. This includes activities such as: jogging, walking, skipping, galloping, jumping jacks, arm windmills, high knees, jump roping and hopping back and forth over a line, either side-to-side or front-to-back, dribble and pass a soccer ball back and forth to a partner, dribble a basketball down a court or pass the ball back and forth, and throw a football back and forth with a partner.

The duration and intensity of the warm-up will be determined by the fitness level of the participants. However, five to ten minutes is recommended on average for a warm-up. Stretching should be considered to be part of a warm up. Stretching alone should not be considered to be an adequate warm up. It must be combined with light physical exercise.

Here are some stretches that can be included in the warm-up/cool down (adapted from the Navy Physical Readiness Program):

**Stretch 1: Chest Stretch**
**Description:** In a standing position, gently join both of your hands and place them on the back of your neck. Slowly pull your elbows back until you feel a stretch on your chest. Do not pull your head forward or place tension on the neck.
**Stretch 2: Shoulder Stretch**
**Description:** Place your left hand on the back side of your right arm above your elbow on the front of your body and gently pull your arm across your body. You should feel a stretch on the back side of your shoulder and upper arm. Repeat to stretch the other side of your body.

![Stretch 2: Shoulder Stretch](image)

**Stretch 3: Triceps Stretch:**
**Description:** Take your left arm and reach behind your back. By placing your right hand on the back side of your left arm, gently push back to achieve a stretch on the left triceps muscle. Repeat on opposite side.

![Stretch 3: Triceps Stretch](image)
Stretch 4: Outer-Hip-and-Low-Back-Stretch:
Description: While in a sitting position (legs in front of you with knees straight), cross your right leg over the left. Your right foot should be on the ground at approximately your left knee level. Take your left elbow and place it on the outside of your right knee and gently push your knee towards the left side of your body. You should feel a stretch on the outer portion of your right hip and in your low and mid back region. Repeat on opposite side.

Stretch 5: Abdominal Stretch:
Description: On your stomach, place your hands palms down on the ground beneath your shoulders and gently push up until you feel a stretch in your abdominal muscles. Do not fully lock out your forearms.

Note: If you feel any discomfort in your low back while performing this exercise, you can reduce the tension by going onto your elbows.
Stretch 6: Low Back Stretch:
**Description:** While lying on your back, gently hug one or both knees to your chest. You should feel a stretch in your low back.

![Low Back Stretch Image]

Stretch 7: Hip Flexor Stretch:
**Description:** In a standing position, place your right foot approximately 3 to 4 feet in front of your left foot (like a lunge). Slowly bend both knees until you lower your body towards the ground. Your left knee should almost be at 90 degrees. Gently push your left hip forward to feel the stretch in the front of your hip. If you don’t feel the stretch, gently lean your upper body back.

![Hip Flexor Stretch Image]
**Stretch 8: Quadriceps Stretch:**
**Description:** In a standing position, with a slight bend in your left knee, grab your right ankle with your right hand and maintain your balance. Gently pull your right foot towards your buttocks while making sure your knees is aligned with the body. Repeat on opposite side.

**Note:** If you are having difficulty balancing you can hold onto a wall to perform this stretch.

**Stretch 9: Modified Hurdler Stretch:**
**Description:** While sitting in a v-position, gently pull your left foot towards your groin area. Your right leg will remain straight with a slight bend in the knee. Gently lean forward and reach for your toes on your right leg to stretch out your hamstring. Repeat on the opposite side.
Note: The stretch will be more difficult if you try to perform while pulling your toes back towards your body (versus pointing them away from your body).

**Stretch 10: Butterfly Stretch:**  
**Description:** While sitting with the upper body nearly vertical and legs straight, bend both knees, and bring the soles of the feet together. Pull feet toward your body. Gently place your hands on your feet and your elbows on your knees. Pull your upper body slightly forward as your elbows push down. You should feel a stretch in your groin area.

![Person performing Butterfly Stretch](image)

**Physical Fitness: Balance/Core Activities:**

**Balance Push-Up:**  
Get into push up position with your feet on a stability ball and keeping your torso straight and abdominals contracted, bend your elbows and lower your chest. Stop when your upper arms are parallel to the floor. Pause and return to start. Do 8-12 repititions.

**Bridge:**  
Lie on your back, with your legs extended and heels resting on a stability ball. Press your heels into the ball, contract your abdominals and gluteous maximus, and lift your hips so your body forms a straight line from your feet to shoulders. Do 8-12 repititions.

**Bridge to Hamstring Curl:**  
With your feet on a stability ball, bend your knees and roll the ball in toward your butt. Extend your legs and roll ball back out, dropping hips to starting position. Do 10 to 12 repititions.
**Hand-to-Foot:**
Lie on your back, with your legs extended on floor. Hold a stability ball with both hands, and extend arms back over your head. Raise arms and legs toward each other, lifting your head and shoulders as you do. Do 5-8 repetitions.

**Hand-to-Foot Ball Pass:**
When your hands and feet are directly up, transfer the ball to your feet, then lower your arms and legs back to the floor. Repeat, this time switching the ball from your feet to your hands at the up position. That’s one rep. Do 5-8 repetitions.

**Balance Plank:**
Lie facedown on the stability ball with both hands on the floor. Walk your hands out, allowing the ball to roll beneath your body until it is under your shins. Your hands should be directly below your shoulders. Hold this position for 30 seconds.
**Self-Esteem: Getting to Know You Lessons:**
- Question Ball
- Two Truths and a Lie
- If You Were in My Shoes

**Self-Esteem: Self-Esteem Lessons:**
- Qualities I Love
- Compliments
- Beauty

**Self-Esteem: Emotions/Feelings Lessons:**
- Crinkle My Heart
- Stress Balloon
- Emotions

**Self-Esteem: Communication Lessons:**
- Ways to Communicate
- Human Knot
- Forgiveness

**Self-Esteem: Gender Lessons:**
- Gender
- Stereotypes

**Self-Esteem: Healthy Bodies Lessons:**
- Food and Nutrition
- Drugs and Alcohol
Self-Esteem: Getting to Know You Lesson - Question Ball (adapted from Girls Only toolkit)

OBJECTIVE: Group members get to know each other better by answering questions chosen at random.

MATERIALS: Three small beach balls with questions written on each section in ink.

TIME: 15-20 minutes

PROCEDURE:
1. Before you begin this activity, write questions or statements on the beach ball in ink. Some sample questions are: What is your favorite food, movie, color?; What grade are you in?; What do you do in your free time? Some sample comments are: Show your favorite dance move; Act like your favorite animal; Sing your favorite song.
2. The teacher/facilitator should begin this activity by introducing her/himself and then tossing the ball in the air and catching it. Read out loud the question or comment that your right thumb has landed on.
3. After the question is answered, throw the ball to someone else in the group. Whoever catches it should stand up and introduce herself. She should read the question or comment that her right thumb has landed on.
4. Follow this process until everyone in the group has had a chance to introduce themselves and answer a question. You can continue until all the questions or comments have been read.

EVALUATION: Were group members engaged in this activity when they were getting to know each other better, and did they answer the questions when it was their turn?

EXTENSION: Have students come up with their own questions to be written on the Question Ball.
Self-Esteem: Getting to Know You Lesson - Two Truths and a Lie (adapted from Girls Only toolkit)

OBJECTIVE: Group members get to know each other by sharing two truths and one lie about their lives.

MATERIALS: Index cards, pens or pencils

TIME: 15-20 minutes

PROCEDURE:
1. Explain to group members that they will get to know each other a little better by participating in the icebreaker “Two Truths and a Lie.” Participants will share three things about themselves; two are true and one is not. They will share all three items with the group and the rest of the group will try to determine which ones are fact, and which is fiction.

2. Explain that the truths can be anything about their lives that they want to share with the group. The members choose to share surface level facts, such as: I have two siblings, or they can choose to go deeper with personal information, such as: my parents are divorced. It is fun to get creative with the lies to make them sound like they could possibly happen. Also, it is fun to tell truths that may sound like a lie. For example a truth could be, “I have been skydiving two times.” People will be amazed when they find out that the truth really happened and it opens up the communication in an authentic way.

3. Give the participants about five minutes to think of and write down their three items.

4. Have one group member read their three things out loud and let the others guess which ones are true and which is a lie. Continue this process until every group member has had a chance to share. Encourage conversation about what is shared. For example, if someone shared that they had been white water rafting, a group member might say, “Wow, I can’t believe that you did that. Tell me what it was like.”

5. Remind group members that this is a game to help us get to know each other better and that you are not promoting lying in any way.

EVALUATION: Did the group members share information about their lives and did this information open up conversation so participants could get to know each other better? Did group members express an interest in what was being said about others’ lives?

EXTENSION: Change game to Two Lies and One Truth
Self-Esteem: Getting to Know You Lesson - “If You Were in My Shoes” (adapted from Girls Only toolkit)

OBJECTIVE: Group members get to know each other and build empathy for each other by sharing what life is like in their shoes. Participants will realize that they are not alone in the struggles they face in their lives.

MATERIALS: Paper, pencils, pens, crayons, and markers

TIME: 15-20 minutes

PROCEDURE:
1. Discuss the saying: No one really knows what someone else’s life is like until they “walk a mile in their shoes.” (Topics to consider for discussion: We all have unique lives and experiences. No one really knows what another’s life is like unless they share that information. If we understand another person’s life experiences, we get a deeper understanding of who they are as a person. We are not alone in what we are experiencing).
2. Pass out attached handout of shoes, writing utensils and paper and have participants draw the outline of a shoe on the paper. The shoe should be about the size of the paper. On the outside of the shoe write the sentence beginning: “If you were in my shoes…” On the inside of the shoe write statements or draw pictures that finish the sentence and show what it’s like to live in their shoes. For example: …you would never get to see your dad, … you would feel like nothing you do is good enough, …you feel very hurt when you walk down the hall and others make negative comments about you.
3. After group members have completed their shoes and cleaned up their work area, they should move to form a circle (either in chairs or on the ground).
4. Participants share what it’s like to live in their shoes by sharing the items they wrote down inside the shoe. Invite other group members to share and discuss any similarities amongst their lives. Each group member should get a turn to share.
5. Discuss the possibility that everyone can get a new pair of shoes. As the old ones wear out and do not fit our lives anymore, we can get new ones and fill them with sayings that better fit what we would like our lives to be like.

EVALUATION: Did the group members share what their lives are like? Were group members engaged in the conversation and did they seem genuinely interested in learning about their peers’ lives? Do group members understand that everyone has different life experiences, but we are not alone in these experiences?

EXTENSION: Focus on positive aspects about “If You Were in my Shoes.”
Self-Esteem: Self-Esteem Lesson: Qualities I Love (adapted from Tariq Khamisa Foundation)

OBJECTIVE: Group members can identify positive qualities about themselves that they like and are proud of. Participants will create a project that represents their positive qualities.

MATERIALS: Assortment of colored paper, stickers and other decorative materials, glue or glue sticks, scissors, assorted writing materials (crayons, markers, colored pencils, pens), and a whiteboard and whiteboard markers.

TIME: 25-30 minutes

PROCEDURE:
1. Explain that we all have qualities that we really like, and some that we might not be crazy about. Today we will focus on the qualities we like. The facilitator should begin by naming a quality she likes about herself (ex. I like my determination and that I never give up. I like my curly hair. I love that I am true to my friends).
2. Remind participants that we each have different qualities to be proud of and not to feel bad if we do not have the same positive qualities.
3. As a group, brainstorm positive qualities that members have and write them on the whiteboard.
4. Individually, have group members come up with 5-10 qualities that they like about themselves.
5. When group members are done writing down their personal, positive qualities (about 5 minutes), pass out all the art supplies.
6. Participants will each make a paper flower, and on each petal of the flower (5 to 7) they will write one of their positive qualities.
7. Petals can be any shape or size desired.
8. Each group member should make a center for their flower and write their name on it.
9. Glue all petals to the back of the center.
10. Share flowers and qualities with the group.
11. Hang flowers on a designated special bulletin board that is set aside specifically for this group.

EVALUATION: Were group members able to identify positive qualities about themselves? Did they create a flower using these positive qualities?

EXTENSION: Participants can come up with positive qualities about other group members.
Self-Esteem: Self-Esteem Lesson: Compliments (adapted from Girls Only toolkit)

OBJECTIVE: Group members will practice giving and receiving compliments, and they will practice being respectful by identifying positive qualities in other participants.

MATERIALS: None

TIME: 20 minutes

PROCEDURE:
1. Group members/facilitator should form a circle using chairs or on the floor.
2. Discuss what a compliment is and how it makes you feel.
3. Discuss why some girls are hesitant to give compliments and some girls do not like to receive them.
4. Explain that compliments should be sincere and come from the heart.
5. Explain that participants will both give and receive compliments today. The facilitator can begin by complimenting the person sitting directly to her left (ex. I really like how Samantha is always willing to help others in need. I love how Cameron always has a smile on her face and makes me feel comfortable to be with her). The one who received the compliment will simply say, “Thank you.” Next, that person will compliment the person to her left, and that person will say, “Thank you.”
6. Continue until everyone has had a chance to both give and receive a compliment.
7. Discuss how the compliments made each group member feel.

EVALUATION: Did participants practice giving genuine compliments? Were they able to receive compliments? Were group members able to share how compliments made them feel?

EXTENSION: Have participants practice giving sincere compliments outside of the group and report back to the group how it made them feel.
**Self-Esteem: Self-Esteem Lesson: Beauty** (adapted from San Diego County of Education)

**OBJECTIVE:** Group members are able to come up with a definition of beauty that is acceptable to all participants and compare that definition to popular ideals of beauty. Also, group members will be able to identify beautiful things about themselves.

**MATERIALS:** Writing utensils, 3 small index cards per participant, small bowl, pictures of people who have had plastic surgery, computer, videos or online pictures of celebrities and models who have been photo-shopped.

**TIME:** 30 minutes

**PROCEDURE:**
1. Pass out the three small index cards to each group member and have them answer this question on one of the index cards: “What do you see or feel about your body when you look in the mirror?” There should be no discussion and their answers are anonymous.
2. Fold index cards and put them in the bowl.
3. Explain that each card will be read aloud and the group has to decide if the comment is positive, negative, or somewhere in the middle (ex. fat stomach, pretty hair, short or tall)
4. Sort comments into three piles: positive, negative, somewhere in the middle.
5. See which pile is the biggest and discuss why they are so critical of themselves.
6. Now have group members talk about things that are beautiful, and discuss what makes that thing or person beautiful (ex. the ocean, a sunset, a pretty melody, a specific celebrity, a diamond necklace).
7. Ask the following questions: “What makes someone or something beautiful?” “Who decides who or what is beautiful?” “Does everyone have the same definition of beauty?” “Is beauty inside, outside, or both?” “Is being perfect the same as being beautiful?”
8. Now discuss why group members would or would not include themselves on the list of beautiful things.
9. Show pictures or online pictures of before and after plastic surgery.
10. Show online pictures of before and after photo-shopped celebrities and models.
11. Discuss reactions and feelings about what they have just seen.
12. Now have each group member pair up and tell their partner 3 things that make them beautiful. Also, describe three beautiful things about the partner. (Remember, beauty can be on the inside or the outside.)
13. Finish the lesson by reminding each group member that they are beautiful! Give specific examples of how group members are beautiful on the inside and outside.
**EVALUATION:** Were participants able to come up with their own definition of beauty? Could group members see flaws in the popular view of beauty? Did participants identify things that are beautiful about them?

**EXTENSION:** Have group members look at magazines to identify people who have been photo-shopped. Also, keep a journal of all the beautiful things they see in the world.
**Self-Esteem: Emotions/Feelings Lesson – Crinkle My Heart** (adapted from Youthlight Inc. training, “‘Mean Girls – Strategies and Resources in Identifying and Helping Relationally Aggressive Girls and Empowering Their Victims’”)

**OBJECTIVE:** Group members learn about the power of words, both negative and positive, and as a result build empathy towards others.

**MATERIALS:** Assorted colors of small paper heart cut-out for each participant, large paper heart cut-out, tape, whiteboard, and whiteboard markers

**TIME:** 15-20 minutes

**PROCEDURE:**

1. Ask group members to raise their hand if they have ever been hurt by something that someone said.
2. Now ask group members to raise their hand if they have ever said anything hurtful about someone else.
3. Explain that this activity is meant to show the power of words. They can really hurt someone, and they can make someone feel really great.
4. Pass out a small paper heart to each participant and explain that it represents their own heart.
5. Explain that words and actions can hurt us and make our heart hurt. Give direction that for each word that makes us feel bad, we will crumple our paper heart a little bit.
6. Ask for examples of words or actions that make us hurt. Some examples are: ugly, fat, stupid, being left out, made fun of, or teased for being different. List these negative words on the whiteboard and crumple the heart a little bit for each one.
7. Talk about what is happening to the paper heart and how their heart feels when negative things are said to them.
8. Now talk about words and actions that make them feel good. Some examples are: pretty, helpful, nice, being included, making a new friend, or someone compliments you. List these positive words on the whiteboard and uncrumple or smooth out the heart for each one.
9. Talk about what is now happening to the paper heart and how their heart feels when someone says something positive about them.
10. Now look at the smooth, uncrinkled heart and notice that you still see lines running all through the heart. This represents how negative, cruel words can stay with a person for a long time. Ask participants to remember this the next time they think about saying something hurtful.
11. The group members should say one thing they will remember about this activity.
12. Have participants tape their little paper hearts to the big paper heart. Use this poster as a reminder of the power of words.
**EVALUATION:** Did the group members identify words that are both hurtful and positive? Were they able to express how these positive and negative words made them feel?

**EXTENSION:** The big heart, with all of the little hearts on it, should be hung somewhere in the room. The facilitator or group members can crinkle it a little every time they hear a negative comment. They can smooth it out when they hear a positive comment.
**Self-Esteem: Emotions/Feelings Lesson – Stress Balloon** (Adapted from Tariq Khamisa Foundation)

**OBJECTIVE:** Group members brainstorm and discuss ways to handle stress.

**MATERIALS:** One balloon for each participant, whiteboard and markers, and “Joleen’s Day” story

**TIME:** 25 minutes

**PROCEDURE:**
1. Explain that stress is a normal feeling that all humans experience. We can feel stressed when we are tired, have a lot of things to get done, we are not getting along with a friend or family member, or we have a big test or event coming up. Stress can make us feel worried, angry, nervous, sad, anxious, or a combination of these emotions.
2. Have group members talk about a time when they were stressed and what emotion they felt.
3. Explain that it is normal and OK to get stressed out. The important part is how we deal with our stress and the emotions it brings.
4. Explain that the balloon represents our heart and all the stress that can be found there. When we get stressed out, our heart can fill up like a balloon (blow into the balloon to demonstrate).
5. Each added stressor adds more air to our balloon (blow more air into balloon).
6. Ask participants to observe what is happening to the balloon as each stressor is added.
7. What will happen when the balloon gets too full? (It pops!)
8. Explain that we can do things in our lives that will help release the stress in a positive way. (let some air out of the balloon).
9. Talk about and list on whiteboard things that group members do to relieve stress.
10. Hand out a balloon to each person.
11. Read “Joleen’s Day” and have participants blow air into the balloon when she feels stressed, and let air out when she relieves her stress.
12. After the story, discuss the things that were stressful and filled Joleen’s balloon up, and the things that helped to relieve the stress and let the air out.
13. Discuss other options that Joleen could have done to release stress.
14. Have an open discussion on the stressors that participants are facing and strategies they can use to reduce stress.

**EVALUATION:** Did group members identify stressors in the story and in their own lives? Were they able to come up with strategies to help reduce stress?

**EXTENSION:** Cut out paper balloons and write positive ways to deal with stress inside of them. Make a bulletin board with these balloons.
Joleen’s Day

Joleen woke up in the morning to her mother yelling at her to get out of bed. She was very tired and not ready to get up, so she ignored her and stayed in bed. Her mother came into the room and pulled her covers off. She felt very angry. When Joleen’s mother left the room, she sat up and took three slow, deep breaths. Then she got dressed and headed to the kitchen for breakfast. Her little brother was eating the last of her favorite cereal. She saw a box of a new kind of cereal she had never tried. She decided to try it and really liked it. Now she had a new favorite cereal. After breakfast, Joleen finished getting ready for school and started to walk to school. Her friends had already left and she had to walk with the new girl in school that she did not know very well. Then Joleen began to talk to the girl and she was nice. Joleen got to school early so she got to play before school. But then a mean boy came up to Joleen and began to tease her and laugh at her. Once again, Joleen took three deep breaths. She then asked the boy to leave her alone, but the boy would not. So Joleen walked away and found some other kids to play with. Then the bell rang and school started. In class, Joleen realized she forgot to do her homework. She had to stay in a recess to finish her work. Then the teacher gave her a snack for being good and finishing everything. After school, Joleen’s mom was late to pick her up. Then when they got home she had lots of chores to do before she was allowed to play. Then her mom was yelling at her because she did not finish her homework from earlier. She was feeling frustrated so she went outside when she was allowed and went for a walk around the block. Once she was calmer, she came in and finished her homework. She felt good that she completed it. Then Joleen had a very good dinner. After dinner, she got ready for bed and went to sleep, ready for her next day.
Self-Esteem: Emotions/Feelings Lesson – Emotions (adapted from Vangie Akridge and My Community Huddle, Inc.)

OBJECTIVE: Group members will identify and describe their own emotions. Participants will act out emotions.

MATERIALS: Pens or pencils, large posted list of emotions

TIME: 30 minutes

PROCEDURE:
1. Start by saying that today we will be talking about things that go on inside of our bodies. Some of these things we can see, and some we cannot.
2. Ask the group members to think about their bodies and to name some body parts (ex. hands, legs, stomach, feet, eyes).
3. Explain that there are things going on inside of our body that we cannot see, but they are a part of every human (ex. feelings, emotions, and problems). Have participants give examples of these.
4. Ask group members to give their definition of emotions and feelings.
5. In pairs, have each group member describe one feeling or emotion that they experienced in the past couple of days.
6. Have volunteers share these emotions/feelings that they talked about in pairs with the whole group.
7. Group members will play a game of charades acting out emotions/feelings without talking.
8. Next, have participants stand up forming a circle.
9. The group leader will explain that things happen that make us feel good, and things happen that make us feel bad. Explain that when a scenario described makes them feel good, they should stay standing. If the scenario makes them feel bad, they should squat down. Keep doing scenarios as long as the group is engaged (approximately 8-10). Some example scenarios are: How do you feel when you get a good grade on a test? How do you feel when someone ignores you? How do you feel when you win a sports game? How do you feel when a teacher calls you out in front of the class?
10. Explain to the group members that life is full of ups and downs, and it is very important to treat others the way we want to be treated. Things that other people say and do have an impact on our emotions; both positive and negative. If we are respectful to others, they will be more likely to be respectful to us.
11. Remind participants that feelings/emotions are a big part of being a human being and it is ok to let ourselves feel them.
12. Have students pair up and tell their partner what emotion they are feeling right now, and explain why.
13. Ask group members to be aware of the emotions they are feeling over the next week.
**EVALUATION:** Were group members able to identify different emotions and were they engaged in the various activities?

**EXTENSION:** Students can keep a feelings journal.
Self-Esteem: Communication Lesson: Ways to Communicate (adapted from Girls Only toolkit)

OBJECTIVE: Group members learn and practice different ways to communicate.

MATERIALS: Paper and writing utensils

TIME: 30 minutes

PROCEDURE:
1. Have group members sit in a circle in desks or on the floor. Play the game of “Telephone.” One participant will whisper a phrase into the ear of the person to the left. That person will whisper what they think they heard into the ear of the person sitting to the left of them. Continue this and have the last person say the phrase out loud. Ask the first person if that was their exact phrase. Did anything change?
2. Now we will play the game “Charades.” Participants will take turns acting out words or phrases without talking while the others try and guess these words and phrases.
3. Discuss what participants did to communicate when they were unable to use words (body language, facial expressions). Explain that this is an example of non-verbal communication and whether we realize it or not, others are picking up on our gestures, body language, and facial expressions.
4. Next, have group members get in pairs. Have them communicate “hello” to their partner in three different ways (ex. verbal, written, gestures).
5. Now have each partner think of an emotion and have them communicate this to their partner in three different ways. For example, if the emotion is happy, she could have a big smile on her face, they could draw a smiley face, or she can simply write, “I am happy!”
6. Refer back to what happened during “Telephone” and “Charades.” People do not always understand what we are trying to communicate, and things we say can get changed or distorted. This is how rumors start and gossip spreads. Someone tells a person a secret, and that person tells someone else the secret, changing or distorting the original message. Every time someone new hears the message, it gets distorted a little bit more.
7. Discuss the importance of being clear with both our verbal and nonverbal communication, and remind group members that it is something that takes practice.
8. End the session by using your nonverbal skills to say goodbye and show how you feel about them.

EVALUATION: Were group members able to communicate in different ways? Do they understand how rumors and gossip start and spread?

EXTENSION: Have group members talk about a time when they were involved in a rumor; either starting one, spreading one, or the victim of one.
Self-Esteem: Communication Lesson: Human Knot (adapted from the Girls Only toolkit)

OBJECTIVE: Without letting go of their hands, group members will work as a team to untangle their human knot to form a connected, whole circle.

MATERIALS: None

TIME: 15-20 minutes

PROCEDURE:
1. Have group members stand shoulder to shoulder in a circle, facing each other.
2. Explain to students that this game is about communication and working together. Tell them that they will try to untangle themselves without letting go of their hands.
3. Have group members reach across the circle and grab the hand of another person.
4. Now have them reach across the circle with the other hand and grab hands with a different participant.
5. Explain that their goal is to untangle themselves without letting go of hands. The key to success is teamwork and communication with each other.
6. In the end, it is ok if some group members are facing out and some are facing in.
7. If this becomes too difficult, have them let go of hands and discuss strategies for making it easier. Begin again.
8. If they figure this out quickly, they can do it multiple times.
9. Congratulate group members on their effort.

EVALUATION: Were participants able to work as a team and untangle their bodies without letting go of hands? Did they communicate with each other in the process?

EXTENSION: Try this activity without talking and only using nonverbal communication.
Self-Esteem: Gender Lesson: Gender (adapted from the Girls Only toolkit)

OBJECTIVE: Group members look at what it means to be a girl and how this influences their lives. Participants will explore the difference between a person’s biological sex and gender roles. Students will think about the effects and limitations of gender roles.

MATERIALS: Whiteboard and whiteboard markers, paper, and writing utensils.

TIME: 35 minutes

PROCEDURE:
1. Discuss what it is like to be a girl/boy in today’s society.
2. Explain the difference between biological sex and gender roles. Biological sex is the physical characteristics that make someone male or female. For example, a male is usually born with a penis and testicles, while a female is usually born with a vagina and ovaries. On the other hand, a gender role is the way a person behaves as a boy or a girl. The main difference is that biological sex is something people are born with and gender roles are behaviors and ideas that people learn and live out.
3. Divide participants into two groups.
4. Pass out paper and writing utensils to each group and have one group brainstorm and write down what is expected of girls in our society today (ex. girls should be quiet, girls wear makeup). The other group should do the same, but for boys (ex. boys are good at sports, boys do not cry). Tell each group to think about what families expect, what friends expect, and what the media promotes.
5. Have each group share what they wrote down with the whole group.
6. Take each list and post them on the whiteboard. Draw a big box around each list.
7. Explain that some of the things on each list are because of biology (ex. girls have babies), but some are because society expects this (ex. women should cook the meals and look after the children). Look at each item on the list and determine whether it is because of biological sex or gender role.
8. Discuss how group members feel about the expectations of both boys and girls.
9. Discuss what it is like for girls to step out of the girl box and boys to step out of the boy box. What pressures they experience to stay in their respective boxes? Is it fair to place these expectations on boys and girls? Where did these expectations come from?
10. Ask participants if they feel limited by being a girl. What do they like and dislike about being a girl?
11. Now erase the boxes that you drew around the boy and girl list. This will represent equality. Explain that all girls and boys have the right to be who they want to be. The more we are aware of the difference between gender roles and biological sex, the more prepared we will be to make decisions about who we are as a person. We can look and act in a way that will remain true to who we are.

**EVALUATION:** Were participants able to distinguish between gender roles and biological sex? Did group members discuss what it is like to be a girl in today’s society?

**EXTENSION:** Bring in speakers who hold jobs that are not typical to gender roles (ex. female fire fighter, or a male nurse).
Self-Esteem: Gender Lesson: Stereotypes (adapted from Tariq Khamisa Foundation:)

**OBJECTIVE:** Group members come up with a definition for stereotype. They identify expectations that others place on them because of their gender. Participants will analyze and breakdown stereotypes and they will see themselves outside of these stereotypes.

**MATERIALS:** Writing utensils, pictures or videos of common stereotypes, “Just Because” worksheet.

**TIME:** 30 minutes

**PROCEDURE:**
1. Discuss what the word stereotype means to group members.
2. Explain that stereotypes are beliefs that every member of a group acts a certain way simply because they are a member of that group. (Ex. all blondes are dumb, all fat people are lazy, or all Asians cannot drive).
3. Brainstorm ways in which group members have been stereotyped based on their looks, age, gender, ethnicity, etc. (ex. I like makeup because I am a girl; I’m good at math because I am Asian).
4. Discuss how this makes them feel.
5. Talk about where we learn stereotypes (family, media, friends).
6. Show pictures or videos of common stereotypes.
7. Tell group members that they will write a poem about themselves based on common stereotypes.
8. Read, “Just Because” poem to the group.
9. Pass out “Just Because” worksheet and give group members 10-15 minutes to fill it out.
10. When finished, have volunteers read their poem aloud to the group.
11. Discuss what participants learned about stereotypes.

**EVALUATION:** Did group members identify common stereotypes? Did participants identify stereotypes people might have about them? Did group members challenge these stereotypes that people have about them? Did students write a “Just Because” poem?

**EXTENSION:** Make a bulletin board with all of the “Just Because” poems.
Just Because

Just because I am____________________________________

I am not____________________________________________

I am not____________________________________________

I am not____________________________________________

I am________________________________________________

Just because I am____________________________________

I am not____________________________________________

I am not____________________________________________

I am not____________________________________________

I am not____________________________________________

I am________________________________________________

Just because I am____________________________________

I am not____________________________________________

I am not____________________________________________

I am not____________________________________________

I am________________________________________________

Just because I am____________________________________

I am not____________________________________________

I am not____________________________________________

I am not____________________________________________

I am________________________________________________

I am________________________________________________
Just Because
(Anonymous teen girl, San Diego, CA)

Just because I am Mexican,
  Doesn’t mean I speak Spanish
  Doesn’t mean I am “illegal”
  Doesn’t mean I’m illiterate
  I am a good reader.

Just because I am a girl,
  Doesn’t mean I like to shop
  Doesn’t mean I am boy crazy
  Doesn’t mean I can’t play sports
  I am a loyal friend.

Just because I’m Catholic,
  Doesn’t mean I go to church
  Doesn’t mean I read the Bible
  Doesn’t mean I am better than you
  I am a nice person.

Just because I am young,
  Doesn’t mean I am naïve
  Doesn’t mean I don’t care
  Doesn’t mean I will “understand someday”
  I am a human being.
Self-Esteem: Healthy Bodies Lesson: Food and Nutrition (adapted from the Girls Only toolkit)

OBJECTIVE: Group members are exposed to various healthy foods. Participants practice reading food nutrition labels. Students will brainstorm different healthy food options.

MATERIALS: A variety of healthy foods, or pictures (ex. fruits, vegetables, nuts, whole grain bread), a variety of unhealthy foods, or pictures (ex. soda, chips, candy), food packages (ex. cereal boxes, frozen food bags, chips, juice), paper, writing utensils

TIME: 35 minutes

PROCEDURE:
1. Ask group members to talk about what every human being needs to stay alive (ex. food, water, air, shelter)
2. Now, ask each person to write down what they have eaten so far today.
3. Explain to group members that we all need food to survive, but not all foods are created equal. The food we eat gives us energy to dance, run, play, and maintain an active life. Some foods are better at doing this than others. Our bodies need the right combination of foods to grow and work properly.
4. The food we put into our bodies determines how well our brain works, nail and hair growth, breath, and teeth, bone, and muscle strength.
5. Ask participants to give examples of what they think are healthy and unhealthy foods.
6. Now show actual examples (or pictures) of healthy and unhealthy foods and have group members put them into groups: healthy, unhealthy, and unsure. Discuss why certain foods were put in each category.
7. Remind participants that we are what we eat. If we put healthy foods in our bodies, such as fruits, veggies, nuts, and whole grains, then we are filling it with the nutrients and vitamins it needs to grow and feel strong.
8. On the other hand, if we fill our bodies with processed foods, fast foods, or foods high in sugar and low in nutrients, we might feel weak, sick, and have low energy.
9. Point out that it is ok to eat bad foods occasionally, as long as the majority of the food that we eat comes from the “healthy pile.”
10. Now pass out some packaged foods so group members can practice reading food labels. Explain that the nutrition labels give us information about what nutrients are found in the food. Some examples are: vitamins, fat, protein, sugar, calories, and fiber.
11. Have group members read each element and discuss what it means. Make sure to discuss serving size and servings per container. Participants might be surprised to find out how many servings are actually in one package.
12. Pass out paper and writing utensils and brainstorm healthy food options such as: oranges, apples, bananas, celery, carrots, peppers, different nuts, whole grain bread, and low or nonfat yogurt.

13. Participants should take the list home and post it on the refrigerator as a reminder to make healthy choices when possible.

**EVALUATION:** Were group members able to differentiate between healthy and unhealthy foods? Did they learn how to read nutrition labels? Were they able to come up with some healthy food options for themselves?

**CAUTION:** Make sure that participants realize they do not need to eat healthy all of the time.

**EXTENSION:** Have a nutritionist come in and speak to the group. Show videos on food and nutrition.
Self-Esteem: Healthy Bodies Lesson: Drugs and Alcohol (adapted from the Girls Only toolkit)

OBJECTIVE: Group members will learn both the mental and physical effects of using drugs and alcohol. Participants will practice resisting peer pressure, and they will learn positive coping skills and ways to stay sober.

MATERIALS: Facts about drugs and alcohol

TIME: 1 hour (may need to be divided into two sessions)

PROCEDURE:
1. Discuss what group members think they know about drugs and alcohol.
2. Show pictures and videos of the effects of drugs and alcohol. Google images for the effects of drugs and alcohol and numerous pictures will come up.
3. Explain that there are many different types of drugs that can hurt both their minds and bodies. Ask group members to come up with some examples.
4. Distribute and discuss fact sheet about the effects of drugs and alcohol. This should include: Alcohol is a depressant and if affects our memory ability; cigarettes turn our lungs black and can cause cancer in smokers; higher rates of risky behaviors, such as teen pregnancy, are associated with drug and alcohol use. You can print out fact sheets from various websites such as: reachout.com and drugfree.org.
5. Now that group members know the negative impact that drugs and alcohol can have on a person, discuss how some people will still try to get them to do drugs and alcohol. Explain when friends try and persuade you to do something that you are not comfortable with, it is called peer pressure.
6. Have group members discuss times when they have experienced peer pressure.
7. Explain that sometimes it is hard to say no to our friends even though we know that doing drugs and alcohol can be very harmful. Ask students why they find it hard to say, “No,” to their friends (ex. you want your friends to think your cool, you do not want to be left out, and it looks fun when family members do it).
8. Tell participants that they will practice resisting peer pressure by role-playing different situations.

Scenario #1: “Be Cool” – Trevor and John offer you a cigarette. They tell you that it will make you look cool. They also tell you that the boy you like, Jake, will like you even more if you smoke. You have two choices, take the cigarette or don’t. Talk about the consequences and options for each decision: If you smoke the cigarette you may get sick, feel scared, get in trouble because it is illegal for people under 18 to smoke. If you do not want to smoke the cigarette you could say, “No
thank you, I know the smoke will give me a bad cough.” Also, you could say, “If Jake does not like me because I don’t smoke, then I do not want to hang out with him.” You will feel healthy and happy about the decision you made to not smoke.

Scenario #2: “Forget All of Your Problems” – Your friend offers you a beer and tells you that it will help you forget all the problems you are having with your parents. If you drink the beer you may get sick, you might not forget about anything, you may get in trouble because it is illegal for people under 21 years of age to drink alcohol. If you do not want to drink the beer you could say, “No thank you! I know that alcohol will not make me feel better.” You can also leave the situation and go for a walk outside. Also, you can make an excuse and say that you need to go home because you have something you need to do. By not drinking the beer, you will feel healthier and you will not get in trouble.

Scenario #3: “Have Fun” – You are hanging out with your cheer squad after a very big competition. The captain offers everyone a small pill. She tells them that it will help them relax and have a good time together. If you take the pill, you may feel sick, not remember what you did, or you could get in trouble. If you do not want to take the pill you could say, “No thank you! I do not know how that pill will effect me.” You could offer a different option such as eating pizza and watching a movie to relax and have fun together. By not taking the pill you feel healthy, you do not get in trouble, and you feel proud of yourself for how you handled the situation.

EVALUATION: Did participants discuss and identify the risks of alcohol and drugs? Did group members role-play to practice avoiding peer pressure?

EXTENSION: Have a drug counselor, doctor, or nurse come in and talk to the group about the negative effects of drugs and alcohol
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