



COACH DAVE'S CORNER

When it comes to autism, the benefits of exercise go far beyond the obvious...

BY DAVID S. GESLAK

For the past 10 years, I've talked with school administrators, special education departments, parents and professionals and many are still unfamiliar with the research that shows exercise can be an effective treatment for individuals with autism.

In addition to the health-related benefits, exercise can increase on-task behavior, and decrease both repetitive and inappropriate behaviors. Also, a meta-analysis of 16 studies suggested that on average, exercise interventions led to a 37% improvement in symptoms of autism, specifically behavioral and academic improvement. Behavior change and academic performance are what parents want and what teachers strive for, but exercise is still underutilized or not used at all.

We've developed a solution to address the problem of introducing exercise to individuals with autism. ExerciseBuddy, an iPad app that that uses four evidence based practices (exercise, visual supports, video modeling and technology-aided instruction) that we hope will give schools the tools they need to make exercise a part of daily routine for individuals on the spectrum. A team consisting of myself, an exercise professional, a special education teacher, a speech language pathologist, and a technology guru built ExerciseBuddy to be a springboard to establishing consistent and effective exercise programs.

Six universities (Western Illinois, Texas Women's, Brock [Canada], Oregon State, Wisconsin-LaCrosse, and Winona State), parents, OTs, PTs, recreation therapists and PE teachers are now using ExerciseBuddy and having tremendous results.

I've seen exercise increase confidence levels and self-esteem while giving parents newfound hope and optimism. That is something that every family impacted by autism deserves. ◀

DAVID S. GESLAK, BS, ACSM-HFS, CSCS ...

...Coach Dave, founder of the Exercise Connection (EC), is widely recognized for the pioneering of structured visual exercise programs, as well as his insightful and dynamic presentations. Dave has experience as a para-educator and was a Fitness Coordinator at Giant Steps, a school for children with autism. He is an author, advocate, hosts a TV Show "Coach Dave" on The Autism Channel, and trains parents and professionals across the world on his protocols. He employs individuals with autism at the EC and is developing the first employment program, incorporating exercise, within Hart Schaffner Marx, a company in Chicago. The autism community has enthusiastically embraced Dave's message and is especially encouraged by his results. ◀

exercise  buddy
VISUAL EXERCISE SYSTEM

