

Children's video makes exercise bearable

BY JOAN RANSBERRY
Staff Writer

Does the road to obesity begin in early childhood?

Yes, according to fitness instructor, dance teacher and choreographer Angela Tucker.

The owner of York Dance Academy, which operates in Aurora and Newmarket, joins health officials across Canada in reminding parents obesity in children is, indeed, on the rise.

A 1999 national study of Canadian children shows 37 per cent of children aged two to 11 were overweight, including 18 per cent who are classified as obese.

"Almost 60 per cent of Canadian children do not meet average fitness standards," Mrs. Tucker said.

"Millions of dollars have been spent on developing awareness among adults. We stress the importance of maintaining a healthy fit body and mind for adults," the Ballantrae resident said. "A whole industry has been born around physical fitness, clubs, products and self-help organizations. The human adult is becoming more and more fit and healthy. However, our children are being ignored."

To add to the problem, schools place less emphasis on physical education, Mrs. Tucker said.

"While most schools would state they are dedicated to educating the



STAFF PHOTO/MIKE BARRETT

Angela Tucker works out with children at York Dance Academy in Newmarket.

child as a whole, the fact is not much time or emphasis on the school curriculum is devoted to the physical needs of the children," she said.

"Research shows that the fitness and activity levels of a substantial number of North American children are inadequate," she added.

Concerned about the lack of

attention to keeping toddlers fit, Mrs. Tucker created the Teddybear Workout, a 22-minute video exercise program for children from one to six years.

"Most videos in fitness are for children over six years. After they're six years old, it's almost too late to start children. The need to be fit has to be established earlier," she said.

"We want to educate our children to the value, the joys and benefits of an active lifestyle. This is accomplished during the pre-school and primary years, when activity patterns are being established."

Teddybear Workout involves six toddlers learning songs and activities that promote a healthy workout. The video shows the children taking

part in a warm-up, cardiovascular and strength conditioning session, flexibility routine and cool-down.

Children incorporate their favourite teddy bears into the program.

"Kids love bringing their teddy bears along," Mrs. Tucker said.

In addition, there is a story about a little bear that grew up to learn a lesson about being fit.

When making the video, Mrs. Tucker and the children visited the Whitchurch-Stouffville fire station in Ballantrae. There, Fire Chief Tim Beckett told the children they need to be in excellent shape to be firefighters.

Firefighters know how important it is for children to get fit and to remain fit, Chief Beckett said.

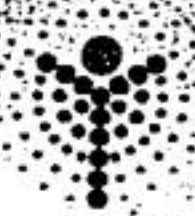
"We promote healthy living early. When it's introduced in early childhood, it's easier to continue as an adult," he said.

Health experts say the best way to ward off obesity in adults is to plant the seeds of healthy living in toddlers.

"Participation in recreation and sport has a huge impact on children and the way they develop," Howie Dayton, president of Parks and Recreation Ontario, said.

Mrs. Tucker can be reached at York Dance Academy at 905-726-1241. Information is also available at www.teddybearworkout.com.

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