

How Good Fitness Relates to Strong Character Values

By Katrina Litchford

Thomas Jefferson once said, “A strong body makes the mind strong.” This valuable piece of wisdom is as true today as it was 250 years ago. Our country faces several challenges today; however the greatest are weak character values and unhealthy lifestyles. How then, is good fitness related to strong character values, you ask?

Fitness develops such character values as discipline, dedication, responsibility, and sensitivity. Discipline is habit of being reliable, consistent, and self-controlled. As one begins to exercise regularly, they establish a habit, and thus the foundation of discipline. This process involves setting realistic goals, making a plan, and deliberately choosing to carry out that plan to accomplish the goal. For example, a runner who aspires to compete in a marathon would be wise to write a plan of action to achieve that goal. After the plan has been laid forth, the runner uses self-control to focus and reach success. In this way, fitness develops discipline by instilling the habit of determination and consistent follow through.

Similarly, strong fitness develops dedication and commitment. For example, as exercising regularly becomes a pattern, one begins to achieve goals, and is encouraged to continue. Therefore, dedication is more than exercising regularly, it is being determined not to give up and persevering with a whole hearted effort to achieve the goal. Though staying committed is often easier said than done, participating in competitive sports offers a solution by providing an encouraging team spirit, positive community atmosphere, and accountability. According to Anna Kuckment, “there are teammates to work out with and a coach to help set goals.”¹ Dedication is having sincere loyalty to one’s goals, ambitions, and values. This same dedication also transfers to relationships with family and friends. To illustrate, Steve Chugg, 52,

¹ Anna Kuchment, “On Your Marks” News Week. Mar 26, 2007, Vol. CXLIX, No. 13, pg. 56

believed that after starting a regular fitness program it made him a better father, friend, and “all-round better person psychologically.”²

Furthermore, fitness develops responsibility. For example, if one chooses to watch television instead of training for a race, then one can not expect to perform their best. Likewise, if one does not study in school, then one can not expect to score well on an exam. How we practice is how we perform, thus it is our initiative, preparation, and responsibility that determines a person’s level of success.

Moreover, fitness develops confidence and respect. For example, as one sets and accomplishes goals, self-esteem and confidence improve. At Harvard Medical School a study on exercise and the mind determined that regular exercise improves your mood, resilience in the face of stress, and raises self-esteem.³ In other words, as one is successful, even in small accomplishments, then they are encouraged and thus gain purpose, ambition and ultimately, self-respect. One important aspect of respect is integrity. This is especially true concerning interactions with others, since honesty is an essential element of strong character and healthy relationships.

Lastly, fitness develops sensitivity and concern for the wellbeing of others. Oftentimes, citizens choose to give back to their community, and fitness provides a means to that end. For example, funds from races and tournaments are commonly used to support the Red Cross, cancer patients, and other community efforts. As a result, fitness contributes to a greater concern for others, and thus a better community.

Ultimately, fitness provides a means to affect the future by developing good character values such as discipline, dedication, responsibility, and sensitivity along with a positive attitude and high self-esteem. Though our journey is never complete, our actions today can lead to a healthier, more confident character tomorrow. For this reason, one should be motivated to strive for a higher quality of life through their level of physical fitness, while gaining fulfillment from new accomplishments and having concern for others. In conclusion, fitness develops strong character values through its challenges, rewards, and lasting impact on our lives.

² Anna Kuchment, “On Your Marks” News Week, Mar 26, 2007, Vol. CXLIX, No. 13, pg. 59

³ Michael Craig Miller M.D., “Exercise is a State of Mind” News Week, Mar 26, 2007, Vol. CXLIX, No. 13, pg.48.

Bibliography

Kuchment, A. (May 26, 2007). On Your Marks. *News Week*, CXLIX(13): 56, 59.

Miller, M. C. (May 26, 2007). Exercise is a State of Mind. *News Week*, CXLIX(13): 48.