

Autonomy Supportive Coaching to Achieve Health Literacy

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Abstract : Health Literacy is defined as the degree to which people have the capacity to obtain and understand information to make health decisions. Illustrated are three levels of health literacy: (1) Functional literacy refers to the transmission of information about e. g. physical activity and nutrition; (2) interactive literacy implies the development of personal and social skills to adopt health-related behaviour and (3) critical health literacy indicates advanced cognitive skills connected with personal empowerment to critically analyse health information, to define self-determined goals and taking action in various situations accordingly. The achievement of the third level refers to self-determination and autonomy which should be outcomes of exercise programs for overweight children as health-related behaviour change will occur and persist if it is autonomously motivated. Method: We adopted a quasi-experimental design with group (autonomy supportive coaching, control) and session (pre-test, intervention, post-test, and follow-up-test). Overweight and obese children and adolescents at the age of 8-14 years (N=40) received a 6-month (20 sessions) exercise program with autonomy supportive coaching implemented by the coaches and sandwiched between pre-test and post-test. All participants (N=92) completed the German version of the Basic Needs Satisfaction Scale Sport and Exercise. Additionally, we assessed the engagement in the exercise program by the MVPA (Moderate-to-Vigorous Physical Activity) and by the adherence and drop-out-rate. Results: Participants in the intervention group perceived their autonomy as moderate in the post-test and the follow-up-test. However, the psychological intervention failed to develop a high autonomy, as both groups show moderate perceived autonomy from the pre-test to the post-test. Participants in the intervention group were higher engaged in MVPA in the exercise program and they attend the program more regularly. Discussion: Young overweight and obese children and adolescents can acquire autonomy using autonomy supporting coaching. However, research identifying the extent they achieve critical health literacy is required to implement an autonomy-supportive coaching style into exercise programs for this target group.

Keywords : autonomy support, coaching, health literacy, health promotion

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