

HEALTH

Rochdale Borough Council and Unlimited Potential

An invitation to tackle childhood obesity – Energy Club

Childhood obesity in Rochdale is increasingly mirroring patterns of socio-economic deprivation. Reducing childhood obesity is a high priority for Rochdale Borough Council.

Weighing and measuring at reception and year 6 presents an opportunity to engage with families of children who are overweight or obese and offer appropriate support. The Energy Club is the main programme offered. Run by Link4Life as part of Living Well Rochdale, it is a fun and educational lifestyles programme for families.

Uptake of Energy Club has been poor. Discussions with parents and school nurses suggest that the National Child Measurement Programme (NCMP) letter, telling parents their child is overweight or obese, is a major barrier. It upsets many parents: they are often shocked, angry and feel blamed, and ignore or challenge it.

Our project has been developed in consultation with children and parents, Big Life group, Link4Life, Pennine Care NHS Foundation Trust, and Rochdale Council

The approach being tested is based on feedback, plus research findings:

- focussing on weight is stigmatic and produces negative responses
- initial engagement is with parents, whose primary concern is their child's happiness
- continuing engagement is driven by the child, whose primary concern is fun and friends

The project therefore seeks to engage the whole family, from their perspective, and to focus on happiness and emotional well-being, rather than weight.

Once height and weight of eligible children in reception have been measured in schools, a personalised 'party invitation' is sent to families with an overweight or obese child, instead of the standard NCMP letter.

The invitation and envelope are colourful, include cartoon 'healthy heroes' characters, and do not mention weight. Following testing with children and parents, the invitation focuses on happiness and stresses fun, friends and free activities. It uses very simple language, making it accessible to all, including those with only basic literacy.

Any core message to parents and then children must be consistent throughout their whole experience (school, communications, and programme sessions), so work is done with frontline staff, such as school nurses, health improvement workers and leisure staff, to enable and encourage this.

The approach is being tested in three primary schools in one ward. As well as direct feedback from families and staff, key measures of success are:

- children sent the 'party invitation' and those sent the standard NCMP letter
- parents who make contact
- bookings made for the Energy Club
- children who turn up at the Energy Club

For further information contact:

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