

Training Program Overview

Developed by the Little Rock Marathon

SUMMARY STATEMENT

The Little Rockers Kids Marathon Training Program, presented by the Hatcher Agency encourages children 1st through 6th grades to become more physically fit by following a fun, simple, and rewarding running and/or walking program. The goal for each child is to complete at least 25.2 miles before race day, then finish their final mile of the marathon (26.2 miles) on the official Little Rock Marathon course. Once they complete the marathon distance they will be presented with an official marathon finisher's medal.

The training program is free, however the "Final Mile" event held race weekend is not free. An additional registration and fee are required.

Programs are not required to participate in the "Final Mile" during race weekend. If you determine that your program cannot participate in the Final Mile race weekend, please contact the Little Rock Marathon staff to discuss alternatives. Please see the website for details and registration fees.

This program motivates children to become physically fit, which helps them control body weight, burn off excess energy, improves focus and builds self-esteem. The emphasis is on living actively, eating in normal and healthy ways, setting and working to achieve goals, and creating a nurturing environment that helps children recognize their own worth. It is recognized that obesity, eating disorders, hazardous weight loss, nutrient deficiencies, size discrimination, and body hatred are all interrelated and need to be addressed in comprehensive ways that do no harm.

Improvement in health and wellbeing for all children, both immediate and long-term, is the desired outcome of the Little Rockers Kids Marathon Training Program. We encourage activities focused on a healthy lifestyle, rather than weight loss, and on the whole person — physically, mentally, and socially.

As in all programs serving children, we need to help them understand that healthy behaviors that can be reasonably incorporated into their lives will enhance their normal growth and development. Adults are responsible for creating a nurturing environment that helps children recognize their own worth and respects cultural and family traditions.

By participating in the Little Rockers Kids Marathon Training program, children will discover that physical activity can be fun and rewarding. Walking and running helps develop fitness while building muscles, burning calories, reducing stress and creating good lifetime habits. The children can also enhance their scholastic skills! Schools around the country that have similar program find that:

- First graders are introduced to fractions (*by counting laps*).
- Students learn geography by plotting miles on a map.
- Participants learn about the environment.
- Children learn how to set goals, work to achieve goals and evaluate their achievement.

Based on these premises, we offer the following recommendations to program planners, parents, teachers, school staff, and health professionals who wish to start a Little Rockers Kids Marathon Training Program.

I. HOW THE TRAINING PROGRAM WORKS

There are two types of training programs:

- Official Programs – 10 or more children from a schools, religious organization, neighborhood, sports team or civic group.
- Home Participants – overseen by a parent or guardian.

The benefits and structure work the same for both official programs and home participants. All activities, forms, etc can be adapted to any organized group. Creating a program can be as creative as the volunteer leader wishes as long as it follows the basic guidelines set out by the Little Rockers Kids Marathon.

**Participation in the Little Rockers Kids Marathon and Training Program is voluntary.
No child should be forced to participate.**

A. Official Programs

Schools, day care centers, after-school programs, church youth groups, or civic clubs can use the Little Rockers Kids Marathon Training Program as an activity that will unite and challenge children to reach a common goal at their own pace. Volunteer parents are a key part of a successful program. Participants build up miles over an extended period of time. As each child reaches his/her set mileage goals (*i.e. 2 miles, 4 miles, 8 miles*) they receive a small award. Groups can begin the program immediately or begin in January (*see 9-week training schedule*). The benefits for schools participating in the program are tremendous, but generally require parent involvement. Recess time is the best time to conduct training and the number of trainings depends on the amount of time the parents have to commit to supervising training. Benefits for school programs include:

- **For kids - it's fun and different;**
- **For playground supervisors - it channels the children's energy and there are more adults on the playground;**
- **For teachers - it gets children ready to learn – valuable time isn't wasted trying to settle arguments after recess. Children return to class ready to learn and eager to show the teacher how much they trained on the playground;**
- **For principals – it can be part of a child's education process;**
- **For parents - it's getting their child fit and teaches them about schedules, discipline and reaching goals.**

B. Home Participants

If your child's school or church does not offer the Little Rockers Kids Marathon Training Program, the benefits of an organized program are available at home. The Little Rockers Kids Marathon Training Program can be a key component of

quality time with your child. There are no video games, phones, or televisions to distract you or your child during training. The whole family can get into the program.

Additional benefits for home programs include:

- **For kids - it's quality time with the family.**
- **For parents - it will help improve your fitness level as well.**

C. Getting Organized

PRE-TRAINING ACTIVITIES:

1. Get permission from the school to offer the training program through the principal, teacher, PTA, etc.
2. Ask a couple of other parents to help with this project.
3. Set a date for training to begin.

SUGGESTION: Allow time for permission letters to come back from parents.

4. Create a poster or flyer to post around the school announcing the program.

SUGGESTION: Use the poster offered by Little Rockers.

5. Meet with the students to tell them about the program (*if given enough notice a member of the Little Rock Marathon Committee can help you talk about the program to the school and to the children*).
6. Send a letter of explanation home with each child who wishes to participate or to the entire class. Make sure to put **your** contact information so parents can ask questions.

SUGGESTION: Use the Sample Parent Letter in the Leader Kit.

7. Send a Permission/Waiver Form with your letter. **REQUIRED IF LEADER IS A PARENT CONDUCTING THE PROGRAM ON BEHALF OF THE SCHOOL OR ORGANIZATION.** Teachers do not have to have this form if training is a part of class activities. You should have this waiver on file BEFORE a child starts training with you. This form should stay with you and should not be sent in to Little Rock Marathon headquarters.

SUGGESTION: Use the Permission/Waiver Form in the Leader Kit.

8. Determine incentives to celebrate the children's progress. Depending on your budget (*if you have one*) you can get as creative as you want. The important thing is to reward mileage milestones.

SUGGESTION: Review "Motivate Your Little Rocker" sheet in the Leader Kit.

9. Set your course. The course you choose may be on the playground, track, empty parking lot or sidewalk. It should be $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ mile in length. To determine the size of your course, use a measuring wheel or simply walk the course and count the number of steps (the average step of a 5'8 to 5'10 person is 30 inches).
 - i. $\frac{1}{4}$ mile = 1,320 feet or 528 steps
 - ii. $\frac{1}{2}$ mile = 2,640 feet or 1,056 steps

10. Identify the course with pylons, flags, landmarks, and/or line markings (*use flour or see your school's athletic department*). Think safety. Kids can and will trip on the slightest of things. Also, design the course to reduce the possibility of shortcuts. If possible, lay out the course so it can be seen in entirety. You might also appoint children each week to be the mile monitors to make sure everyone does the distance.
11. Make a rainy day plan.
12. Meet with the children one last time to tell them what to expect and the way training works. Please try to make it the same day each week as they usually look forward to their training time with you.

SUGGESTED SUPPLIES:

Copies of permission slips (blank), posters, file folders (for completed permission slips), fun stickers (signifying the child signed up or participated in training), and magic markers.

TIME COMMITMENT:

5 hours (at most)

Once you have set up your program and your training is slated to begin, we recommend you and/or your helpers do the following:

TRAINING ACTIVITIES:

1. Arrive early to set up for training. You are responsible for supplies needed for training.
2. Have a teacher bring the students to you. The time for training is rushed so get with the program when the children get to you.
3. Getting children organized is like herding cats so make pre-training announcements **BRIEF**. Give the children something to think about while they are training (*i.e. funny saying or educational tip*). The teacher can let you know what the children are studying that particular week or month.
4. A quick (**NOT bouncy**) stretch is recommended.
5. Position yourself or helper at the starting point of the course. Each time the child passes you or your helper, give them a lap marker (*Popsicle stick, rubber band, etc.*). When they are finished training they will return the lap markers to you so you can count their mileage. You can reuse the lap markers each training session.
SUGGESTION: *There are always a couple of children who want to help. Ask if someone wants to be a special helper and rotate that special helper each week.*
6. Students should train on the designated course. Emphasize they can walk or run. It all counts toward their mileage goal.
7. When the child completes their session you can have them pull their official training log and bring it to you so you can mark their mileage or you can mark their mileage as they finish. Here is where helpers are very important.
8. Award their mileage milestones with incentive.

9. When the training session is over, ask the children to sit, stand, or stay together until the teacher comes to get them from you or a parent arrives if it is after school.
10. Extra Touch – mail or email (*if the parent has one*) a note to the parents to tell them what their child accomplished

SUGGESTED SUPPLIES:

Large plastic tote (carry supplies), file box (for official training logs) – can be an old shoe box or recipe box, incentives (toe tokens, craft buttons, stickers, beads, brag tags, etc.), blank name tags (until you learn their name), hole punch (to punch out training logs), fun stickers, markers, water, and healthy snack (raisins or crackers).

TIME COMMITMENT:

3 hours (at most) per week

II. SETTING APPROPRIATE GOALS

All incentive awards are designed to be a source of accomplishment, recognition and positive image building. The children also learn responsibility, mathematics, and record-keeping skills. Mileage milestones at which children receive their incentives are up to each program leader. Two factors to help you determine incentive levels are age and area the children will train in. That being said, there are other goals to be incorporated into each training program and are determined by each group.

A. Set Goals for Health - Not Weight

Expecting all children to be at an *ideal weight range* is unrealistic and can lead to problems.² It is more realistic to expect that children maintain a healthy weight. Healthy weight can be defined as *the natural weight the body adopts, given a healthy diet and meaningful level of physical activity*.³

B. Set Goals for Increasing Self Esteem

A nurturing environment promotes all aspects of growth and development for children — physically, mentally, and socially. This environment fosters self-esteem, body satisfaction, and a positive body image, qualities that facilitate health-promoting behaviors. “*What is inside them is what counts*” should be a guide for dealing with children, so that character, aspirations, talents, and gifts of all are recognized and cultivated. Youth today need tools to empower them to combat our culture’s current extreme focus on appearance.

C. Set Goals for Healthy Eating

We urge attention to both *what* and *how* children eat. Good nutrition focuses on following the Dietary Guidelines,⁴ understanding portion size and energy density, and regularly eating recommended servings from all five groups of the Food Guide Pyramid.⁵ Healthy eating patterns include eating a variety of foods, having regular meals and snacks, responding to body signals of hunger and fullness, creating a positive

environment for meals, and eating family meals together when possible.

D. Set Goals for Physical Activity

The goal is for all children to achieve the following:

- Be active at least one hour a day;
- Reduce sedentary activities (limiting television to less than 2 hours a day and replacing excessive television and screen time with more involving activities);
- Increase strength, endurance, and fitness;
- Enjoy movement as natural and pleasurable;
- Learn skills for sports and activities they will continue and enjoy through life.

Children need access to a variety of activities so each can succeed in some activities. Opportunities for physical activity need to be available within the school day, in after-school activities, and at home with family and friends.

Among young children the appropriate focus of physical activity is to provide ample opportunity for active free play and movement. As children mature, they need to master movement skills, so they can participate confidently in many different forms of activity, and come to understand that fitness is intimately related to long-term health and wellbeing.

REFERENCES

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FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT:

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More information about the Little Rockers Kids Marathon is available at www.littlerockmarathon.com.