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Airedale Back Care for Children (ABC) Programme

Research has shown that found 50% of children would experience low back pain by the age of 14 and poor lifestyle practices and postures in childhood can lead to spinal problems in adults. The ABC initiative now equips and empowers children from 6 - 12 years old to change their lifestyle and also enhances schools' PSHE programme.

The Airedale Backcare for Children (ABC) programme in Bradford was designed in the response to the "growing problem" of Low Back Pain.

Statistically 60% of the population will suffer with disabling acute low back pain, this may resolve within 6 weeks but in 60% will reoccur within a year and in up to 15 % will become permanent.

Research by the charity 'BackCare' (www.backcare.org.uk) alarmingly found 50% of children would experience low back pain by the age of 14. Poor lifestyle practices and postures in childhood can lead to spinal problems in adults.

In 2000, the Bradford Health Authority, funded by Health Action Zone and subsequently in partnership with Bradford's Children's Fund, supported the setting up of the Airedale Back care for children (ABC) Programme. This exciting health education initiative was the idea of three chartered Physiotherapists based at the Airedale Physiotherapy and Sports Injury Clinic, Keighley, West Yorkshire.

Shocked by Backcare's research findings and urged by clinical pressures to prevent rather than purely treat low back pain, the ABC team used their professional expertise to design and develop a dynamic, interactive workshop presentation. The simple concept was to take back care into the class-room. By visiting class sized groups of children, and working together with teaching staff, the lessons aims to equip and empower young people to change their 'lifestyle', thus increasing the chance of preventing low back pain through out life. The 'ABC' team also aims to promote the subject of adolescent back care within the school environment and offers advice to schools on the topic.

Courses

The 'ABC' team run one day courses for health care professionals through out the UK. The course aims to share the experiences of the 'ABC' team and to encourage others to use this valuable programme nationwide. To date, over a 100 delegates have attended the course - from Exeter to Stirling to London - and have learnt about adolescent back pain, health education for minors and issues around funding. Past attendees have subsequently started child back care programme throughout the UK. To date, mostly physiotherapists have attended the course, and the 'ABC' team are particularly interested in meeting school nurses and teachers who would like to attend.

Service

The 'ABC' Programme teaches back care to 6-12 year olds with their schools and families also benefiting too. To date, over 12,000 children have taken part in the programme. Workshops have been established for years 2, 5 and 7. An entertaining computer animated video featuring the 'ABC' mascot 'Skelly the skeleton' helps vary the teaching methods during the fast paced session.

These lessons - designed to last 45-60 minutes to fit in with a school's timetable - introduce 5 'core elements' fundamental to the 'ABC' approach. These are; anatomy and physiology; ergonomics; good practice; exercise and philosophy. These issues related to back care are made age appropriate, depending on the school year visited. For example, Year 2 learn what and where the spine is and how it is meant to move, whereas years 5 and 7 learn more about the components of the spine and why it is vulnerable to injury. Further more, Year 7 are expected to relate this

understanding to practical work when they are instructed to invent ergonomically sound designs including shopping trolleys and school bags. Children of all ages are asked to act as 'health ambassadors' and to share the back care message with their families.

The content and style of the back care lessons has been carefully designed to complement the PSHE/Citizenship syllabus in Primary and secondary schools. The important subject of back pain prevention comfortably fits in with health and safety, personal care, accident prevention, and health promotion topics. In essence, the 'ABC' back care lessons offer an 'off the shelf' answer to the introduction of this vital health message, providing schools visited with a resource file full of extra work that can be completed by the class after the visit.

Workshops

Dynamic, fun, interactive workshops introduce 5 'core elements' fundamental to 'ABC' approach; anatomy and physiology; ergonomics; good practice; exercise; and philosophy. Back care lessons for Years 2, 5 and 7 have been designed by the physiotherapists to enhance the Personal and Social Health Education (PSHE) syllabus in Primary and Secondary schools. The lessons are supported by educational resources, including a computer animated video. Schools are encouraged to complete follow-up work. The children are asked to take on a 'health ambassador' role and cascade back care information back home.

In addition to visiting schools, the team hold training days for health and education personnel to learn the 'what, why and how' of the 'ABC' Programme- for details contact the clinic.