

Group Exercise Programs

Group exercise programs provide several benefits including greater social support, more diversity in stage development (advanced participants may be a source of encouragement to the newer participants), and a wealth of personal experiences (sharing common experiences) (Marcus & Forsyth, 2009). Group exercise can also foster a fun, high-energy, exciting atmosphere due to more participants engaging in physical activity, creating a sense of belonging/camaraderie (belongingness theory) and working towards some common goals (e.g. even something as simple as finishing the class session) (Beauchamp, Carron, McCutcheon, & Harper, 2007; Marcus & Forsyth, 2009).

The group experience does have a few drawbacks such as participants getting "lost" in the crowd; teaching/exercising with people in many different stages of behavior change and activity; monitoring individuals' physical activity level/intensity and their technique/form; addressing individual needs; defining individual goals within the larger class goals; and giving attention to each person (creating sense of inclusion) not letting dominant personalities "overrun" others (Marcus & Forsyth, 2009).

Group exercise may be challenging to conduct, but with some help, practice, and education instructors can create a rewarding fitness experience for participants. Identify stages participants are in as the instructor will play a more didactic role with stages 1-2 participants as opposed to a more motivational role in stage 2-3 participants (Marcus & Forsyth, 2009). Stage 4-5 participants require less feedback, but may benefit from tips on technique or performance enhancement to keep challenging them. Offer progressions and regressions (for all levels), and follow-up with participants after class. Classes with participants of similar age-group and/or similar gender are preferred (and have better attendance) (Beauchamp et al., 2007; Dunlop & Beauchamp, 2013). Lead discussions, encourage questions, bring in guest presenters, and encourage active engagement by the participants by incorporating some of their ideas/concerns into the instruction (tailoring programs).

References

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- Dunlop, W. L., & Beauchamp, M. R. (2013). [Birds of a feather stay active together: A case study of an all-male older adult exercise program.](#) *Journal Of Aging & Physical Activity*, 21(2), 222-232.
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