



## Health and Home:

# Where the Heart Is

**A**s a fitness professional, you deal with overweight and undermotivated clients all day long. You help them understand why it's important to focus on good health; you work tirelessly to inspire and motivate them. And while it's true that your clients are important to you, you have to maintain some professional distance. You can't allow your own health to suffer by stressing over Mrs. Young's latest weeklong pastry binge or Mr. Smith's total refusal to give up smoking. But when it comes to your family and friends, you can't detach yourself. You come home after a long day at the gym to a roomful of couch potatoes, and you just want to scream!

So what do you do when your husband would rather drink a beer and watch the game than go for a walk? How do you get your kids to give up the video games and get on their long-neglected

Keep the **wellness fires** burning with these inspirational stories about how other fitness professionals **motivated** family members.

By Julie Anne Eason

**“I was overweight my whole life. I was a nonathletic bookworm as a kid. I think I went on my first diet when I was in 5th grade.”**

bikes? Where do you turn when you just know your father-in-law is headed for a serious heart attack in the next 6 months? Nobody wants to be a nag, but watching your loved ones' health deteriorate is heart wrenching. Is it possible to be a motivator without being the “bad guy”? Yes it is, and here's how four IDEA members got their families back on track.

## Get the Timing Right

“I was overweight my whole life. I was a nonathletic bookworm as a kid. I think I went on my first diet when I was in 5<sup>th</sup> grade.” Meg Heinz, IDEA member and personal fitness trainer at Bally Total Fitness in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, didn't find the right time—the time when everything clicked for her—until she was 46 years old. “My daughter, Julia, came home from college one summer and wanted to join a gym. Since she was only 19, I went along with her, just to check things out. When she decided to sign up, for some unknown reason I decided to join, too. I thought, ‘Oh, I should have a gym membership.’ I had never been in a gym before; I felt like I had landed on an alien planet! I was 257 pounds and had failed on every diet I'd tried. Yet here I was. So I signed up for a personal trainer and told myself, ‘I can do anything for 5 weeks. I'm going to do everything he tells me to do, without complaining.’ For the first time in my life, I started losing weight [122 pounds over a year's time]. I was so excited that I just kept going and going. The time was just right for me. After that, the management at the gym convinced me to become a personal trainer. I'm now working at that same gym.”

Even though her children watched this amazing transformation, the time was not yet right for them. “I'm married to a naturally thin guy, but my kids take after their mom,” says Heinz. “They've been struggling with their weight their whole lives.” After graduating from college, daughter Julia came home and weighed herself for the first time in a long while. “When she found out she weighed 200 pounds, she just freaked out. That's when she came to me for help. That's when she was ready.”

Heinz helped her daughter work out a sound nutrition and exercise plan that she could stick with. Julia eventually lost 55 pounds and has maintained that loss for more than a year. “With Julia, the biggest help has been that we both [keep a journal of] our food and exercise on Fitday ([www.fitday.com](http://www.fitday.com)). We keep our journals public so we can check up on each other. If other people are going to see what I've been eating, I'm not going to be eating chocolate and ice cream!” Mother and daughter still talk on the phone every day to keep up with each other's successes and frustrations; they keep their journals faithfully; and they show no signs of stopping. This is a real way of life that isn't ever finished, even though both are now happy with their weight and fitness levels.

“My son, David, is a different story,” says Heinz. “Again, I had to wait for him to come to me and ask for help. I'm not a pushy person, even with my clients. When the time was right, I knew that he would come to me.” Twenty-year-old David is diabetic and living at home. With the help of his mom, he's lost 40 pounds and has another 40 to lose to reach his goal. “Even though he's diabetic, David eats pretty much what I eat,” Heinz says. “That makes things a bit easier for him. We go to the gym together and come home to our chicken breasts and salads, while my husband has his big bowls of spaghetti.”

Heinz stressed the same things to her kids that she does to her clients. “I always say there are three components to weight loss: good nutrition, cardio exercise to burn fat and weightlifting to build muscle mass. All three are equally important. So we set up a program for each of those things.” Heinz made sure her kids understood the importance of planning, especially when they would be away from home a lot. “At college and on the job, there are so many temptations that, without good planning, it's impossible to stick to a program.” She also made sure her kids took measurements every 4 weeks “because the scale is not the best measure of success!”

“They believed my advice because they had witnessed my own transformation. Once they finally came to me for help, all I had to do was tell them the same things I tell my clients and be encouraging.” Heinz has had other family members ask her for help, but they weren't ready. They didn't like the advice and didn't really want to change. “My advice to trainers out there is just be patient. Bide your time, and be a good example—because your loved ones are watching you, even if you don't realize it.”

## Give Equal Treatment

Bryce Jackson, IDEA Master Personal Fitness Trainer and owner of Real Fitness in Portland, Oregon, has been athletic his whole life. “I just naturally gravitated toward the fitness world but became a trainer quite by accident. I was working out at a Gold's Gym one day, and the owner of the club walked in and started training next to me. Since I'd read all the magazines, I thought I knew everything. I knew he had a history of orthopedic problems, and thought his routine was dangerous. So I took it upon myself to give him advice,” he laughs. “He said to me essentially, ‘You seem to think you know a lot, and I need personal trainers here, so go get certified and I'll hire you.’ He also said he'd pay for the test, but if I didn't pass it, I'd have to pay him back—and he'd get to make fun of me in front of everyone at the club. I did pass the test and have been a personal trainer for 18 years.”

Fitness for Jackson has always been enjoyable and easy, but it wasn't that way for his mother, Christie. She had been overweight a long time and was struggling with arthritis pain. Over the years,

## “One of my passions is getting kids to be more active.”

Jackson and his wife tried to steer his family members toward good resources for healthy living. “We tried to get my mom and my sisters to join Curves® because we thought it would be a nice low-stress way for them to get some exercise. But they never ended up going.” Jackson says it was hard to watch his mom in pain. When she was younger, she got plenty of exercise during her daily activities, but she just slowed down as time went on.

“One of my passions is getting kids to be more active. Last year, I ran a weight loss contest called Work in Progress. The whole idea was to teach adults to be good role models for their kids by adopting healthy lifestyles. Physical education funding is nearly nonexistent in Oregon. I think schools require just 30 minutes a week! So parents need to understand that they must encourage activity at home. We also wanted to show people that getting fit doesn’t have to be hard—just move more and eat reasonably.”

When Christie learned about the contest, she stunned her son by asking if she could join in. “I was so surprised that she wanted to do it, because she lives a fair distance away and she doesn’t like to drive. I was so flattered that she would even listen to me! But she did everything I told her to, and she actually won the contest.”

It was a tight finish, but Christie wound up losing just over 22 pounds. Participants worked out for 12 weeks in a group setting. Jackson says he tried to keep it easy and interesting, creating individual programs even though everyone worked out together. Group accountability and consistency were the keys to the contestants’ overall success. “I tried to stress that how often they exercised was more important than how hard. I didn’t treat my mom any different than the other contestants, though I didn’t make it impersonal either. I told her frequently that these were not ‘my rules,’ that it’s just the way things work—it’s nature. She seemed to understand that.”

The whole experience brought Jackson and his mom closer together. “We were together for 1 hour every week. I don’t know if that was a happy accident, or if she wanted it from the start. >> But I was just glad to be able to help her relieve some of the pain she was experiencing.” A year after the contest, Christie has kept up with her cardio program and some of the resistance training. Jackson checks on her progress every 5 weeks or so. “Her arthritis pain is holding steady, I think. She would never let on how much she really hurts. But losing the weight has helped a lot, and I’m happy I could help with that.”

Jackson has a 7-year-old and a 3-year-old, who are both very athletic. “Having kids has made me determined to model the behavior I want for them. It’s not something I take lightly.” He believes trainers can help their loved ones get fit by being proactive. “Don’t hesitate to approach them with ideas, even if you think they won’t go along with them. You can wear them down

with repetition, and you never know when they may surprise you. Also, don’t treat them any differently than your regular clients by going harder or easier on them; it’s not good for your relationship. They need to trust you and believe that you’re giving them the right advice. What we teach our clients affects people we may never meet. Everyone we train is somebody’s loved one. Clients should know that if they model good fitness choices, they will teach by ‘accident.’”

### Take Matters Into Your Own Hands

Marcos Prolo, IDEA member and personal trainer, owns Fitness Factory Consulting and Training in Southern California. His mom, Marisa, and sister, Angela, live in Brazil. So they can’t exactly pop over for a quick workout and nutrition counseling.

Prolo still used to worry about them, though. “My mother was a dancer for many years. She’s never really been out of shape. But I went back to visit a few years after leaving home and realized that since she’d stopped dancing, she’d been gaining a little weight and just wasn’t as active as she used to be,” he explains. “She kept telling me, ‘But I walk all the time.’ Well, her version of walking was getting from here to there with a lot of stops.” It was hard for him to speak with her on the phone, knowing she was slowing down but feeling he couldn’t reach out and help her.

Prolo’s mother thought exercise and fitness had to be hard work, and she just wasn’t interested. So he told her about the rating-of-perceived-exertion scale. She was curious about that, so he decided to take the initiative and send her a heart rate monitor as a gift. “I got her the simplest one I could find—one without a lot of buttons and extra features. She thought [heart rate monitors] were only for runners or serious athletes, but she liked [hers]. I told her she needed to walk for at least 30 minutes and the monitor couldn’t go below a certain number, which meant that if she wanted to stop and look at a store window, she had to do it on the way back.” That one little gift was all it took to get Marisa off the couch and walking on a regular basis. “I set targets for her over the phone, and she gave me weekly reports. When those got too easy, we adjusted them.”

It didn’t take long before she went out and bought a treadmill so she could walk during inclement weather. “She put it in the TV room, so now my dad uses it, too, which is great!” It’s been 4 years since Prolo bought that first monitor. Marisa has worn out three of them and is working on her fourth “heartfelt” gift from her son. “Now she wants all the buttons and bells!” he laughs. “Since she’s become more confident with the walking, she has added yoga to her regular routine.”

After watching Marisa’s improvements, Prolo’s sister, Angela, called him for help. “She was also a dancer but then chose a career as a dentist. So she’s not as active as she used to be, either. She

**“I recommended a program, and they reported to me regularly. I’m here to inspire, not to *make* anyone do anything.”**

gained a lot of weight during her pregnancy, and it made her sad. She wanted to be in shape, but she wanted something easy to do.” Angela had a bit of a tough pregnancy, so Marcos suggested she join a water aerobics class to prevent undue stress on her joints. After checking with her doctor, she joined a gym with a pool. She found she really enjoyed her time in the pool, and her husband even joined her in the class. “She had the baby 6 months ago, and she still calls me with reports of how well she’s doing.”

Despite the long distance between them, Prolo says he didn’t really do anything differently with his mom and sister than he would with any client. “I recommended a program, and they reported to me regularly. I’m here to inspire, not to *make* anyone do anything.” He believes that helping his family get fit has brought them all closer together. “They are happy to be involved in my life in some way. Besides, I want them in top shape so that when we do get to visit each other, we can go places and do things. Walking at the mall or playing on the beach takes lots of energy!”

### **Be Sneaky (If You Have To)**

IDEA member and personal trainer Kathy Creighton-Conant owns Body Vision studio in Brookfield, Connecticut. She aims to inspire her children—ages 13, 15 and 16—to stay fit their entire lives, even if she has to be sneaky about it! “My kids are great. They’re athletic and play a variety of school sports. My son, Dan, plays lacrosse, hockey and soccer. My two daughters, Carolyn and Jenna, also play soccer. But during the offseason, they’re total slugs.” The typical American “diet” of television, video games and homework was threatening to send her loved ones into a downward spiral. “Even when they are playing sports, they don’t strength train, and they barely cover the cardiovascular basics. I knew I had to do something.”

By lucky coincidence, Creighton-Conant began working with an apprentice trainer. “I needed some practice clients for her to work with so I could observe her methods and refine her program-building skills. So I had her train my kids and three of their friends.” It helped that the new trainer was young and “cool.” The teens enjoyed their time with her and made some fitness gains. “Unfortunately,” Creighton-Conant says, “it didn’t last. Within 6 months of her departure, they were back to their old habits.

“So, here’s where I got a little sneaky. I routinely invite one or two friends of each of my kids to come to the studio. I charge an extremely low price for a fitness assessment and introduction and then give them free use of the gym. My kids naturally partner up with their friends and get in their own workout, while I sit at my desk and catch up on paperwork.”

Creighton-Conant sees this as a community service. A whole group of teens learns valuable lessons about staying fit and

healthy, and the community gets stronger as well. “I’ve had several parents come and join the studio because their kids are working out here. It’s a win-win situation.” At the moment, with around 30 individual clients in a 1,000-square-foot studio, her training schedule is near capacity. But the teen groups have been working so well that she is considering running adult group-training sessions as well. Don’t think for a minute that her kids don’t know what she’s up to. “But I think they appreciate what I’m trying to do for them.”

### **Walk the Talk**

Whether your loved one is your mother, daughter, best friend or future son-in-law, you can influence the health choices he or she makes. In fact, you are influencing those choices already, just by doing what you do every day. Model the right behavior and be patient. When those you love are ready, they’ll come to you. And when they do finally ask for help, get excited with them. Give them the same advice you give your clients, be encouraging and don’t get upset if they don’t follow through the way you want. Your primary role is that of good friend and confidant. Walk the walk—they’ll get it, eventually.

*Julie Anne Eason is a freelance writer specializing in health and fitness topics. Contact her through her website, [www.JulieAEason.com](http://www.JulieAEason.com).*

© 2006 by IDEA Health & Fitness Inc. All rights reserved. Reproduction without permission is strictly prohibited.