



Wellspring Camps
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Dear Family,

Many Wellspring campers come to camp with some level of reluctance or resistance. This is perfectly normal and makes a great deal of sense based on their life experience. Most campers have struggled with their weight for a long time, perhaps as long as they can remember. They have tried many diets and programs and have not succeeded. These failures make it difficult for them to get excited about trying something new, regardless of the program's credentials or approach.

In other words, when they hear about yet another approach for them to try to lose weight, they think: *"Here is another thing I can try to do that won't work. I'll fail at it like I failed before. I'll miss my favorite foods and it won't work anyway. So, what's the point?"*

In many cases, adolescents and young adults who struggle with their weight are trapped in a negative cycle of weight gain and failed attempts at weight loss; they often resort to a sedentary lifestyle and comforting foods as coping mechanisms for dealing with the resulting feelings of frustration. It becomes almost impossible to see a way out, and much easier to simply stay home and just get by using the coping mechanisms to which they've become accustomed (e.g., Internet, cell phone, food).

Over the past five years, we have worked with thousands of families in exactly this situation.

When they've asked for help, we have recommended the following approach. Countless families have found it to be an effective way to help their child start down the road to a healthier life.

1. At an opportune time, sit down with your son or daughter and ask how they feel about their weight. In this conversation, help your child process any negative experiences or emotions that have resulted from being overweight. Research informs us that being overweight as an adolescent or young adult creates a substantial emotional burden. So help your child recognize these emotions. Both of you have undoubtedly recognized this and discussed this in various ways in the past.
2. Next, talk with your child about how they think things might be different if they were able to return to a healthy weight. Specifically:
 - What would you do that you won't do now?
 - How would you feel differently when you get dressed in the morning?
 - Would you feel different in class or talking to friends?
 - How would you feel about meeting new people?
 - Would you feel better about yourself when you're doing sports?
 - What job opportunities might you consider that don't seem realistic now?
3. If your child indicates an interest in confronting the problem, but is decidedly gun-shy from prior experiences, ask her to spend some time with you watching the Wellspring DVD (much of which is also available at the Wellspring Web site). Make it clear that you're only asking for an investment of 20 minutes to check out what you believe is a new and far better alternative to anything you've tried at home before.

4. After viewing the DVD, see what your child thinks of this as a possibility. Then let your child know that Wellspring would be happy to have one of its Directors and/or former campers call to talk about it some more.

5. If you still feel considerable resistance to the idea of losing weight, you can try asking your child to complete a Decision Balance Sheet. Completing this sheet can increase commitment to change in a positive direction. This aspect of decisional counseling works because when all aspects of a conflicted or difficult decision get put on paper in one place, then the best course of action often becomes more apparent. The negative aspects of the status quo (remaining overweight, in this case) become clearer and the potentially huge benefits of the more favorable alternative (losing weight) are magnified. When paired with a positive direction for action (e.g., attend Wellspring), this can lead to a shift in attitude – seeing weight loss as possible, desirable, and achievable.

Here are the steps to create a Decision Balance Sheet

- Select a goal (e.g., lose 40 lbs. during the next year).
- Write out the “Pros and Cons” of trying to reach this goal. The “Pros” will be the benefits of achieving the goal. The “Cons” will relate to how hard it will be, and the risk of failure.
- Look at the example of such a balance sheet below together and see if it suggests some additions or modifications to your list.
- Rate each “Pro” and “Con” – use a 10-point scale where ten means “extremely important” and one means “not at all important.”
- Review the ratings and add up both columns. In most cases, the “Pros” clearly outweigh the “Cons.”

Decision Balance Sheet: EXAMPLE	
Name: <u>Jane</u>	Date: <u>3/3</u>
What I’m trying to change: <u>To lose 40 lbs</u>	
<u>Good Things About Doing This</u>	<u>Challenging Things About Doing This</u>
1. Look better	1. I might fail at it, too
2. Feel better about myself	2. It will be frustrating sometimes.
3. Get new clothes	3. Maybe I still won’t look too good.
4. Get cuter clothes	4. It will be hard work.
5. Fewer nasty comments	5. I might miss some foods.
6. Look more attractive to guys	6. Doing it will draw attention to me.
7. Healthier	7. I’ll get tired
8. Parents will be very proud.	8.

Remember, you don’t need to get your child bubbling over with excitement about coming to Wellspring. Wellspring’s admission criterion is simply that the camper can view Wellspring as a worthwhile or potentially worthwhile opportunity. Many of our most successful alumni will tell you that they didn’t want to come to camp, but realized it could be an opportunity for them; so they gave it a try.

If you can't get your child to see Wellspring as an opportunity, then you might want to consider another approach. Many parents have successfully made the decision for their child. Once the decision is made, it can be easier on both the child and the parent.

If you are willing to follow this path, you might sit down with your child and tell him or her:
I care about you so much. Nothing is more important to me than your health, and that's why I've made the decision to send you to Wellspring this summer.

It's the most effective program available, and as your parent, I want to give you this opportunity. It's a very important opportunity for you – the opportunity to get to a healthy weight by this time next year.

After you're at the program for a week, if you really can't stand it, we can talk about other options for addressing your weight and for the rest of the summer. But the decision has been made.

Most of the time, when the decision is approached this way your child is likely to begin viewing the situation in a more favorable light. Be sure to leave the brochure in the living room. You can make it clear that you're willing to be flexible about which camp to choose. But, if you remain firm about the decision and the potential value of doing this, your child is quite likely to give it a chance.

If this doesn't happen, please contact our admissions office and let us work with you and your child in this effort. Nearly 100% of our most reluctant campers arrive at Wellspring and find they are having new and exciting experiences, meeting other campers from around the world in an emotionally-safe environment where they're not being judged based on their weight; as a result, the resistance decreases dramatically in the first day or two (oftentimes in the first few hours). Then, once campers begin enjoying activities, making friends and losing weight, it disappears.

This is not to say that your child won't be homesick or frustrated on occasion, or even frequently. Homesickness is very common, particularly when your child hears your voice on the phone and thinks of who and what she's missing at home. Frustration is also common because what we're asking campers to do is hard, and they don't have access to many of the coping mechanisms they're used to having at home. But as long as you remain in constant communication with the Camp Directors, we are always able to work through these issues together.

I hope this has been helpful. Please don't hesitate to reach out to me or to the Wellspring Admissions Department as you work through this important process.

Thank you for your interest in Wellspring.

Sincerely,



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