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Highlighting the positives

The relationship between a fitness instructor and their participants is crucial in motivating people to keep up their exercise regime, according to research from Northumbria University.

People are far more likely to continue exercising if they feel their instructor is committed to them, Sport Development lecturer Dr Paul Davis told the British Psychological Society conference in April.

Researchers asked 100 people at a military-style boot camp and another 130 at a Zumba class to fill out a questionnaire both from their own perspective and through the eyes of their instructor to understand the importance of the

relationship between the person taking the class and the instructor.

They found that encouraging feedback from instructors and a sense of “felt commitment” played a key role in keeping people motivated. Many also reported that the social aspects of working out in a group and feeling competent at exercise were key motivational factors.

Dr Davis said: “Across the two groups we found that instructors who gave the most encouragement and advice on technique were more closely associated with people feeling motivated. Conversely, criticism was perceived to be demotivating feedback.

“Those people who felt they had a good quality relationship with their instructor were also more likely to be doing exercise for social reasons because they enjoyed it and felt they were competent at it.”

The research was carried out by Northumbria academics Dr Paul Davis and Dr Louise Davis with sport development students Gavin Baxter and Amy Richardson.

Dr Davis added: “Getting fit can be a challenge for many but if you feel your instructor is committed and is on your side, you are far more likely to continue to exercise.

“It’s easy to make excuses and let yourself down, but it’s tougher to let down your instructor if you really feel they are on your team.”

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