

TV

Fat camp 'horribly damaging'

By Hannah Davies and Suellen HindeHerald SunMay 20, 2007 01:00am

OBESE teenagers taking part in a new weight-loss show could be left psychologically scarred, health experts warn.

Channel 10's *Teen Fit Camp* will follow the journey of six obese Australian teenagers at an American boot camp, where food is controlled and exercise is unavoidable.

The show was titled *Teen Fat Camp*, but was changed to avoid controversy.

Dieticians and psychologists say the show is exploiting overweight youngsters for the sake of entertainment.

The teenagers have only eight weeks to shape up, by eating 1200 calories, under 20g of fat and achieving at least 10,000 steps a day.

Among them is Victorian teenager Sam, 15, who is morbidly obese, weighing 161kg - the heaviest contestant.

His parents are divorced and fear their son's weight will continue to escalate until he is bedridden.

"I have pretty much been teased most of my life about my weight," Ballarat boy Sam said.

"I would really just like to be seen as something other than a fat loser."

But after a short time at the camp Sam breaks down: "I don't care if I went home and gained 200kg and died."

Melbourne psychologist Dr Michael Carr-Gregg believes this style of television programme is dangerous for the contestants: "I am sick to death of reality programmes exploiting anxieties of young people instead of providing them with accurate, up-to-date information to deal with the problem . . . one of the greatest anxieties of teenagers is body image."

Nutritionist Anthony Power said the show would be "horribly damaging" for the teenagers.

"These children are pawns in a money-making exercise and they will be damaged by it in years to come."



Weighty issue ... Channel 10's new reality show, *Teen Fit Camp*, has psychologists worried about the mental state of its obese teen stars / Network 10

But Channel 10 defended the show, saying it will help young people learn how to deal with obesity issues and develop self-esteem.

A spokesman said: "The teenagers and their parents participated after years of searching for answers to their problems."