

GAME PLAY OR SKILL DEVELOPMENT

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A common topic of discussion for administrators and parents is whether to have development programs or competitive game play for juniors. A lot of research has been conducted that focuses on why children participate in sport and the state of their fitness and skill levels. This research provides valuable information about the path to take in the provision of quality children's sport.

BENEFITS OF SPORT FOR CHILDREN

Some of the many benefits of sport participation for children include:

- Reduced risk of obesity
- Increased cardiovascular fitness
- Healthy growth of bones, muscles, ligaments and tendons
- Improved coordination and balance
- A greater ability to physically relax and, therefore, avoid the complications of chronic muscular tension (such as headache or back ache)
- Improved sleep
- Mental health benefits, such as greater confidence
- Network of support from team sports
- Improved social skills
- Improved personal skills, including cooperation and leadership.ⁱ

Reducing inactivity may be more effective in achieving overall increases in energy levels in young children than putting the emphasis on increasing involvement in sporting activities. Taking steps to reduce children's sedentary time is important.ⁱⁱ

COMMON REASONS CHILDREN GIVE FOR WITHDRAWING FROM SPORT

- Not being as good as they want to be, or feeling they're not as good as others
- Wanting to play another sport or do something else with their time
- Not having enough fun or being bored
- Being forced to play and not liking the pressure
- Not liking the coach, finding the training too hard or not getting as much playing time as other children
- Losing oftenⁱⁱⁱ

From the ages of 5 to 10, children are becoming more independent and physically active than they were in earlier years. Strength and muscle coordination improve rapidly in these years^{iv}, thus it is important to capitalise on this and aid in children's development as they learn to throw, kick, catch.

Ensuring players have the correct technique and fundamental motor skills prevents injury, and muscle and joint strain. Players learn these skills during their development stages in the early years of their life – particularly from ages 5 to 10. Because of these reasons, it is important to focus on young children's skill development as opposed to competitive game play.

Focusing on skill development increases young participants' enjoyment, improves social skills, coordination and balance, assists with long term injury prevention and helps to keep more young people active and involved within their sport. It removes the chance of young children leaving the sport due to not having fun, losing often or not feeling good enough due to decreased playing time.

NetSetGO is Australia's introductory Netball program designed for 5 – 10 year olds. It provides a staged introduction to Netball by focusing on the development of fundamental motor skills and introducing children to the game through modifications that are developmentally suitable. It is important to remember that children aren't adults, therefore focusing on skill development and fundamental motor skills with the assistance of modified rules is essential.

ⁱ Betterhealth.vic.gov.au. 2015. *Sport And Children*. [online] Available at:

<<https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/HealthyLiving/sport-and-children>> [Accessed 11 June 2020].

ⁱⁱ Ibid

ⁱⁱⁱ Raising Children Network. 2020. *Sport: Encouraging Children To Have A Positive Attitude*. [online] Available at: <<https://raisingchildren.net.au/teens/healthy-lifestyle/physical-activity/sport-positive-attitude>> [Accessed 15 June 2020].

^{iv} Northshore University Health System. 2019. *Growth And Development, Ages 6 To 10 Years | Health Encyclopedia*. [online] Available at:

<<https://www.northshore.org/healthresources/encyclopedia/encyclopedia.aspx?DocumentHwid=te6244>> [Accessed 15 June 2020].