



SUCCESSFUL SPORTS PARENTING

Questions Parents Ask

Q. When is my child ready for competition?

A: That is a difficult question, as research on athlete development provides no clear-cut answer. In an article by Passer (1988) addressing this question, he reviewed several areas of development in attempting to provide guidelines on determining readiness for competition:

- Motivational readiness: Because competition is a social comparison process, the young athlete is motivated to compete when he or she possesses a social comparison orientation. Research suggests that around the age of 5-7 kids have the desire for and ability to use social comparison information.
- Cognitive readiness: Competition requires numerous cognitive and reasoning skills (i.e., perspective taking, differentiating between effort and ability) that take some time to develop in youngsters. Researchers suggest that kids do not develop the cognitive abilities to have an understanding of the competitive process until approximately age 12.
- Physical growth, physiological capacity, and development: These factors must also be considered when trying to decide readiness for competition.

Q: What should I tell my child when he or she says it's not fair that she has to compete against Suzy, who is so much bigger?

A: Look at a classroom full of school children. The diversity in size and shape is remarkable. Even though these children are similar in chronological age (calendar age) they may be very different in biological age (physical/sexual maturity). Puberty is a critical point in the developmental process. It is well known that girls mature more rapidly than boys do. In fact, the average girl matures 2-2.5 years earlier than the average boy. However, these values are merely averages and the range can be several years within each gender.

It is important to remember that "early bloomers"-children who move through biological maturation more rapidly than average- tend to be more physically developed. This can sometimes be an advantage for them in sports. "Late bloomers" tend to catch-up over time and will often become even more proficient at the sport. Regardless of the maturational pace of your child, she needs to focus on her personal improvements over time.

Q: Should boys and girls be trained differently?

A: During the early years of sport training, children of both genders are predominantly pre-pubescent. This stage allows for some flexibility in grouping the young athletes. At this point, young boys and girls can train together with relative ease.

Girls tend to move through biological development more rapidly than boys of similar chronological age (approximately 2-2.5 years earlier). This may cause initial differences within the training groups. Further, elements such as aerobic capacity (ability to use oxygen to make energy) and muscle mass are different between genders throughout the later developmental period. Aerobic capacity reaches its peak between the ages of 12-15 in girls and 16-20 in boys. Ideally, training programs should be specifically tailored for the individual.

Q: Are there some exercises that prevent injuries to growing muscles and bones?

A: However, to prevent injury, it is important to develop and maintain strength and flexibility in the joints, as well as to use proper technique. The use of certain equipment or training with poor technique, may place



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excessive force on the joints during training that may be harmful. Be sure to have your child check with his coach for more information. It is important to develop muscular strength, endurance and flexibility to reduce the risks of both shoulder and knee problems. Your child should check with the coach before participating in any exercises designed to increase strength.

Q: Why does it seem so many kids have inhalers? Should my child be on one?

A: Exercise-induced asthma (EIA) and exercise-induced bronchoconstriction (EIB) are common diseases in children. Various agents (such as humidity and temperature of the air) cause an irritation of the bronchioles in the lungs resulting in bronchoconstriction. Typical treatments for EIB or EIA are inhaled medications that aid in reducing the bronchoconstriction and opening the airways (McArdle, Katch, Katch 1991). The inhalers are prescribed by a licensed doctor for the youngster following medical testing to determine both the presence of and severity of either EIA or EIB. As with any prescribed drug, sharing inhalers is not a safe practice.

Although many young athletes may be seen using inhalers, sport participation does not cause asthma in children. Advances in the diagnosis and treatment of asthma have allowed more children and adults to participate in organized sport throughout their lifetime.

*If an inhaler is prescribed for your child, you might want to double-check the USADA (United States Anti-Doping Agency) drug hotline for which drugs are acceptable and which are banned. (800) 233-0393

Q: My daughter can beat several girls in the senior training group, but her coach won't move her up. Why not?

A: While your child may have the physical skills or times to move to the next group, move criteria may also be based on emotional, social and cognitive skills. Additionally, having performance results does not necessarily equate to being able to train in that group. Progression from group to group is set by the coaching staff to ensure long-term development. This allows proper training to be introduced at the appropriate level for each individual child. Obviously your coach believes it is in the best interest of your daughter to remain in that group. Express your concerns to the coach in private, and value the opinion and decision made by your coach.

Q: My son comes home every night and says, "Tommy doesn't help clean-up after practice, so why should I?"

A: First of all, be sure to commend your son for helping out and explain why that's important. Praise him for helping without being asked. In this case you might encourage him to talk to Tommy and ask him to help the coach and the group by pitching in. This will begin to teach your son to deal directly with a problem and the person he has the problem with. Obviously, your son has a respect for others and a good team concept or he wouldn't be asking this question.

Q: My daughter is influenced by the senior athletes. How do I encourage her to have the appropriate role models?

A: That's a tough one. We suggest you begin by complimenting or simply pointing out the behavior of athletes you want her to emulate. Focus on such things as a good work ethic, sportsmanship, a good attitude, and other values held by your family. Beyond your team are many heroes and appropriate role models in every sport. Encourage your daughter to learn about them.