

1. LONG TERM INVOLVEMENT

PROVIDING A QUALITY SPORTS EXPERIENCE
SO YOUNG PEOPLE MAKE A
LIFE TIME COMMITMENT

Introduction

A major focus of junior sport is the development of life-long participation in sport.

As life becomes less physically active, sporting habits and values formed in the growing years are important in helping people to remain active and healthy.

Sport has many benefits including contributing to health and wellness by providing increased activity levels and reducing stress and helping to build a positive self-image.

Junior sport participation has many important social benefits such as

- developing life skills (eg communication, concentration, commitment)
- learning responsibility and discipline
- learning how to work with others in team environments
- learning to cope with success and failure
- developing a sense of community, loyalty and cohesion
- helping some gifted young people become aware they are role models for others.

An enjoyable and challenging junior sports experience can provide the entry to a lifelong involvement in sport for

- fun and friendships
- pleasurable social involvement
- great memories of good times
- reaching potential in elite sport.

All topics in the Junior Sport Guidelines have suggestions for influencing the long-term involvement of young people in sport. They provide more detailed information to help keep young people in sport.

Why do Young People Play Sport?

Sport must be planned around what young people look for to make it a positive experience. In their words

- to have fun with their friends
- for excitement and enjoyment
- to experience challenge, achievement, and personal responsibility
- to use and improve their skills.

Young people over 12 years identify the essence of sport as centred around

- self discovery and self improvement
- open access and fair play
- providing skill acquisition
- the discipline of commitment.

Young people want a safe and supportive environment which encourages them to do their best. They do not enjoy sport when

- there is an over-emphasis on winning by parents, coaches and others
- they don't get enough playing time
- they don't have enough fun
- they cannot play with their friends because of imposed grading systems
- they are made to feel uncomfortable
- they are frightened of being hurt
- they are not as good as they want to be
- the coach is overly authoritarian
- there is high praise for the best performers and little acknowledgment of others.

The number of young people leaving sport as teenagers, especially girls, and particularly after finishing school is a major concern.

To encourage ongoing participation for teenagers, sports providers need to offer activities in a varied and interesting way. Modify sport to reduce competitiveness, and emphasise the social and fun aspects (see Guideline 4).

Parents can help young people to balance the demands on their time if this is a problem (eg school work, part-time jobs, family and peers, entertainment).

1.1 Strategies for Ongoing Participation

- Offer young people social and appropriate competitive opportunities.
- Encourage parents to help young people balance the demands on their time to allow time for sport.
- Cater to the opinions of adolescents with regard to uniform requirements, specially when it is recreational sport.
- Encourage young people likely to drop out to take on roles in administration, coaching, officiating etc.

How Should We Present Sport?

The early sports experience is important. Sports providers need to ask themselves if they are providing lots of opportunities for young people to learn, experience success, and have fun.

Above all, young people need to feel they are getting a fair go in their sporting opportunities.

It is important that sport be made to fit kids, and not the reverse. Modified rules, games and equipment assist in doing this, and help young people to experience success (see Guideline 4).

Development programs and modified versions of sport (see Guideline 4) offer young people

- activities better suited to their capacities with a more suitable level of challenge
- the opportunity to develop skills in a rewarding and enjoyable environment.

1.2. Strategies for Presenting Sport

- Accommodate individual differences by offering a broad range of options that include activities and competition structures for a wide range of abilities.
- Offer sport situations that allow all participants a realistic probability of succeeding in personally relevant ways.
- Give young people opportunities so they feel they have been given a fair go.
- Offer sport at times and for durations to suit young people and their parents/carers (eg short seasons, short practice sessions).
- Work with schools to provide sport when and where it best suits young people.
- Keep costs low.

Motivators for participation

Early sport experiences impact greatly on continued participation. All providers must

- ask themselves if they are doing all they can to make the sports experience for young people a positive one
- ask young people about their views, encouraging constructive feedback to improve junior sport.

Young people's motivations for sport are influenced by

- how people important to them react to it
- the values society places on sport and sports people (specially the winners in elite competition)
- what they perceive people important to them think about their sporting ability.

This means people involved in junior sport must watch the things they say and do as they reveal their attitudes about sport and how they see their young people progress.

Adults must remember that "being wanted" is as strong a motivator for young people as pride, improvement and having fun.

Adults must also be careful not to impose their philosophy of elitism onto young people. This could cause them to drop out because they do not want to pursue the elite pathway.

1.3 Strategies for Motivation

- Make sure the first sport experience for young people is positive.
- Provide experiences so young people feel the satisfaction of belonging (eg a buddy system, welcoming them back).
- Encourage positive attitudes in everyone working with young people.
- Educate parents/carers on why and how to encourage and support their children to participate long-term.
- Arrange social opportunities such as mixed competitions.
- Involve young people themselves in organising competitions and social activities.
- Give young people a chance to contribute to decision making in their sporting activities.
- Encourage involvement by using good role models.

Key Message

Sport has many benefits for young people that contribute to their holistic development, and continue to advantage them as adults.

Experiences within junior sport are important for continued participation. To motivate young people to make a life time commitment to sport, we must

- listen to their views on what makes an enjoyable sports experience for them
- present sport to fit their needs
- at all times, give them a fair go.

Above all, young people must be treated with respect regardless of their capabilities, and experience a safe and accountable environment led by caring sport providers.

Key Points - Long Term Involvement

- Sport provides entry to a healthy lifestyle and the habit is best started early.
- Young people need sport or physical activity and the goal must be on maintaining involvement through fun and achievement.
- Sport provides long ranging social benefits and life skills.
- It is important to understand what motivates young people to stay in sport so we can best deliver it.
- Early positive sports experiences are vital in keeping young people involved.
- The values of society and people significant to the participant are important motivators for staying in sport.
- Modifying sport can help to keep interest and allow success.
- Encourage young people to stay in sport by offering varied opportunities including volunteer roles.
- Young people benefit from a rich sports experience, and the goal is for them to
 - ◇ stay in sport long-term
 - ◇ go as far in sport as their interest and talent allows.

Further Reading

All Guidelines link back to long-term involvement.

Case Studies

1. **Primary After School Sports** illustrates a program for children to have fun and learn skills so they will want to take up sports long-term.
2. **Hockey – Take it on!** illustrates a program to increase membership of hockey clubs.
3. **Royal Life Saving Non-competitive Program** illustrates a program to keep young people in their sport.
4. **Emerald Junior Soccer Participation Strategy for 5-10 year olds** illustrates the use of a modified game to increase an ongoing interest in the game.

1. Primary After School Sports

Primary After School Sports

PASS provides structured sports after school in 30 Canberra schools. It provides children with

- ⇒ the option to do sports rather than after-school care
- ⇒ a different sport each week with about 10 sports covered in a term.

The goal is to have the program running in 60 primary schools, catering for 1000 children.

Sports include netball, hockey, soccer, basketball, cricket, oztag, dance and cycling

Qualified coaches teach basic skills and then organize a game for children to practice their skills. Parents are encouraged to become involved and participate with their children.

Aims of the program are to

- ⇒ help children develop new skills in a professional environment
- ⇒ encourage children to be involved in sporting activities after school
- ⇒ build confidence in children so they will play organised sport at weekends.

PASS won a Commercial Business Development Award at the ACT Bureau of Sport and Recreation Industry Awards in 2002.

2. Hockey - Take It On!

Hockey - Take It On!

Take It On! was developed in conjunction with the ASC's Targeted Participation Growth Sports Program after a national survey of clubs and associations to identify the patterns and current needs and issues for hockey at the grass-roots level.

The program was developed to be suitable for

- ⇒ after-school care
- ⇒ weekend or holiday programs for primary school children
- ⇒ use as a social community activity for secondary school teams and adults.

Take It On! aims to

- ⇒ attract new members
- ⇒ form links with schools and the broader community
- ⇒ attract and develop more volunteers.

The program contains eight sessions of progressive activities through a series of skills sessions, carnivals and modified competitions to promote community participation in hockey in a safe, fun and friendly environment.

The Hockey Leader Program encourages players aged 15 - 21 years to get involved in skills such as coaching, umpiring and management to help deliver the program.

Training support and advice is provided by a Community Officer working closely with the hockey centres involved with the program.

Hockey Australia invites national and state players to become **Take It On!** ambassadors and arranges for them to make guest appearances at the centres.

3. Royal Life Saving - Non-competitive Program

Non-Competitive Program (Royal Life Saving)

Losing young people that no longer want the structure of swimming and water safety lessons and are not interested in the competitive nature of squad swimming caused a new program to be developed.

The **Junior Lifeguard Club** provides alternatives for these participants with the emphasis on **fun** while maintaining strong **club feelings and loyalties**.

Program opportunities include

- swimming skills
- lifesaving knowledge
- fitness
- leadership
- teamwork
- community education programs.

Members record their achievements in their personal waterlog.

Friends can join together and not be differentiated on the grounds of performance. Awards and feedback on individual progress are provided.

The program has resulted in members becoming competent in swimming and life saving while participating in an atmosphere that is fun.

Most importantly, it has retained non-competitive participants within the club structure.

4. Emerald Junior Soccer Participation Strategy for 5 to 10 year olds

Emerald Junior Soccer emphasises participation for all (regardless of skill level) in a supportive family-orientated environment using **Rooball** (a modification of soccer) and fun activities for 5 to 10 year olds.

The aim is to provide plenty of opportunities to be physically active and have fun.

To ensure a supportive environment for players, the association provides direction to parents, coaches, administrators and others on appropriate behaviour through

- information sheets (eg Codes of Behaviour, Behaviour Management Policy and Harassment-free Soccer Policy),
- weekly members' newsletters, and
- the work of an harassment referral officer.

The association has formal strategies for **promoting equal participation** as the right of all members and **enjoyment as the outcome** of games. These include:

- not keeping or publishing scores
- encouraging parents to make positive comments about activities and performances
- requiring coaches to attend an induction where standards and expectations are outlined
- encouragement awards for every player during the season and a participation trophy at the end of the season.