



Department of
Local Government, Sport
and Cultural Industries

19

Long-term involvement

– junior sport policy



This booklet is part of a series covering the nine guidelines outlined in the Junior Sport Framework (JSF) as developed by the Australian Sports Commission (ASC).

The information in this booklet has been reproduced with the permission of the ASC.

The guidelines cover topics to address the needs of young people in sport and include:

1. Long-term involvement
2. Physical growth and maturation
3. Sport pathways
4. Forming links
5. People making it happen
6. Quality coaching
7. Making sport safe
8. The law and sport.

These booklets outline the main points of the guidelines to assist in the delivery of best practice in junior sport and to encourage young people to make a life-long commitment to sport.

A complete copy of the JSF is available on the ASC website: www.ausport.gov.au

Long-term involvement

A major objective for junior sport is the development of life-long participation in sport. As lifestyles become less physically active, sporting habits and values formed in the growing years are essential in helping people remain active and healthy.

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

Junior sport participation has many important social benefits such as:

- Developing life skills (e.g. communication, concentration, commitment)
- Learning responsibility and discipline
- Learning how to work with others in team environments
- Learning to cope with success and failure
- Providing a safe haven where they can have fun and develop a sense of self
- 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 life-long involvement in sport for:

- Fun and friendships
- Pleasurable social involvement
- Great memories of good times
- Reaching potential in elite 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:

- 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 centered 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 booklet 22 in this series, Forming links – junior sport policy).

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

Strategies for ongoing participation

- Offer young people social and appropriate competitive opportunities
- Encourage parents to help young people balance their priorities to allow time for sport
- Cater to the opinions of adolescents with regard to uniform requirements, especially 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 Booklet 22 of this series, Sport pathways – junior sport policy).

Development programs and modified versions of sport (see Booklet 22, Forming links – Junior sport policy) 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.

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 (e.g. 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 of young people

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 (especially 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 as this is a common cause of drop-out if they do not want to pursue the elite pathway.

Strategies for motivation

- Make sure the first sport experience for young people is positive
- Provide experiences so young people feel the satisfaction of belonging (e.g. 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 lifetime 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 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 and to go as far in sport as their interest and talent allows.

Other resources

This resource is part of a series which provides assistance to Western Australian sport and recreation clubs and organisations to become better managed, more sustainable and to provide good quality services to members and participants.

Other resources in the series include:

1. Starting a new club
2. Planning for your club – the future is in your hands
3. Taking the lead! A guide for club presidents
4. The club secretary – the key to efficiency
5. Show me the money – a guide for the club treasurer
6. Effective club meetings – a guide for the chairperson
7. Making meetings effective – a short guide
8. Delegation – help for the overworked committee member
9. Problem solving – a guide for clubs
10. Promoting your club
11. Seeking and servicing a sponsor
12. Establishing your club rules
13. Risky business – a club guide to risk management
14. Clubs' guide to volunteer management
15. Member protection for clubs
16. How to be an inclusive club
17. Passport into schools – linking sports with schools
18. Youth sport – junior sport policy
19. Long-term involvement – junior sport policy
20. Physical growth and maturation – junior sport policy
21. Sport pathways – junior sport policy
22. Forming links – junior sport policy
23. People making it happen – junior sport policy
24. Quality coaching – junior sport policy
25. Making sport safe – junior sport policy
26. The law and sport – junior sport policy
27. Top 20 tips for officials
28. Top 20 tips for successful coaching

You will find the full series of the booklets on Sport and Recreation (WA)'s website:

www.dsr.wa.gov.au/clubs