



National Association for
Sport and Physical Education

*an association of the American Alliance for Health,
Physical Education, Recreation and Dance*

NASPE Sets the Standard

POSITION STATEMENT

Choosing the Right Sport And Physical Activity Program for Your Child

Introduction

Programs promoting sport and physical activity for children and youths have proliferated in recent years. Because the philosophies, objectives, facilities and leadership of those programs can be so diverse, it's imperative that parents/guardians assess program quality, both initially and periodically, to determine whether the program will provide a positive experience – physically, socially and emotionally – for their children.

Participating in youth sports and physical activity programs can contribute positively toward developing:

- Physical fitness and a healthy lifestyle
- Self-confidence and self-esteem
- Motor skills
- Social skills
- Sportsmanship and ethics
- Fun and enjoyment of physical activity

Developing those important life skills should play a central role in a quality youth sports or physical activity program. NASPE's Sport Steering Committee has created this document, which revises and replaces NASPE's 1999 Position Statement of the same name, to help parents assess program quality.

The following section outlines important elements of a youth sport program that all parents/guardians should consider before enrolling a child in any sport program. Each question addresses an item that is integral to a quality sport experience for children. Should you answer any of these questions with a "No," consult the sport program and ask whether any consideration will be given to developing or implementing that item.

Consider your answers to each of these questions as you evaluate school- or community-based physical activity programs for your child. Also, consider your child's characteristics (age, skill level, maturity, interests and special needs) in relation to each area and its components.

Program Administration & Organization

- Does the program have a written philosophy or a mission statement?

If yes, does it address:

- Adequate participation in practices and contests with no discrimination based on ability, gender or race?
- Development of fair play, teamwork and sportsmanship?
- Having fun?
- Emphasis on individual awards and winning are kept in proper perspective?
- Communication with coaches, parents, officials and participants?
- Evaluation of coaches, officials and the overall program?

- Are the procedures for selecting coaches and officials outlined clearly?

- Has the school or organization trained coaches and officials appropriately?

- Does it offer either a meeting or written material to educate parents?

If yes, does the parental education address:

- Program requirements that include, but are not limited to expected costs, insurance coverage, practice and contest schedules?
- Expectations for parent involvement?
- Rules and regulations for the program and sport?
- Proper conduct, including showing respect for and support of the coaches, officials and spectators?
- How to be a positive supporter?

- Are the number and length of practices, contests and tournaments appropriate for the age group?

- Do coaches select teams appropriately, based on age, size, skill and emotional development?

Safety Considerations

- Are the facilities clean and hygienic?
- Do coaches select and adjust equipment based on participants' size and skill level?
- Do coaches inspect, maintain and replace equipment on a regular schedule?
- Are the practice and competition areas safe, inspected regularly and maintained?
- Is the necessary safety equipment (e.g., mats, protectors, body gear, spotting rigs) present?
- Does the coach regularly inspect and replace first aid supplies as used or needed?
- Are emergency medical forms, first-aid supplies and personnel available and easily accessible?
- Is the ratio of coaches/staff to participants appropriate for providing adequate instruction, supervision and safety at all times for the participants' age and skill level?
- Are warm-up and conditioning activities part of the program to ensure safety and prevent injuries?

How to Evaluate Your Child's Readiness to Participate

- Do your child's interest level and desire to have fun match the group or team's philosophy?
- Do your child's age, skill level and size match the group or team?
- Is your child emotionally and socially mature, as compared to those in his or her age group?
- Do your child's interest and ability match the group or team's level of intensity and competitiveness?
- Does the group or team include children with special needs?
- Does the group or team encourage cultural and gender diversity through its structure, activities and attitudes?

Choosing the Right Sport for Your Child (Cont.)

- Does the coaching staff treat all children with respect and give meaningful opportunities to learn skills and participate fully?
- Does the coaching staff challenge and articulate expectations appropriately?
- Does the coaching staff provide a wide variety of opportunities for developing fundamental skills prior to position specialization?

Parent/Guardian Commitment to the Child's Participation

- Are you willing to support your child's interests and realize that having fun is the most important reason that children choose to participate in sport and physical activities?
- Are you willing to provide the necessary time and assistance (i.e., encouragement, transportation, meeting attendance, volunteering, observing) each week to ensure a successful experience?
- Do you understand the financial and time costs associated with participation?
 - If yes, can you meet such costs?
 - If no, does the group or team provide assistance for children or families with financial needs?
- If the organization or league doesn't provide adequate coverage, are you willing to provide insurance coverage for your child?
- Are you willing to respect and support coaches' and officials' decisions, even though you might disagree with them?
- Are you willing to discuss in private any concerns you have with the coaching staff?
- Are you willing to act supportively of the coaching staff as teachers of your child?
- Are you willing to respect and follow the rules and procedures of the club, league or organization that is providing the program for your child?
- Are you willing to adjust family time as necessary to support your child's participation?
- Are you willing to support your child's active involvement by emphasizing participation, skill development, cooperation and teamwork?
- Are you willing to be a supporter who focuses on the positive aspects of youth sport and physical activity programs?

Guidelines for Determining Future Participation

After your child has completed a season of participation, use your answers to the following questions as a guideline for determining his/her future participation.

- Did your child have fun?
- Did your child's emotional and social maturity match that of his/her teammates?
- Was the coaching staff's team selection consistent with its stated philosophy?
- Was the program's actual administration consistent with its stated philosophy?
- Was the equipment sufficient and available for all participants?
- Was the number of practices, contests and tournaments appropriate for this level of activity?
- Did the coaching staff modify activities to meet individual participants' needs?
- Did the coaching staff interact and communicate effectively and respectfully with participants, parents and officials?
- Did the coaching staff emphasize encouragement and positive feedback?
- Did the coaching staff teach participants how to cope with negative feelings, such as embarrassment, anger, frustration and fear?
- Were the coaching staff and officials knowledgeable about the sport?
- Did the coaching staff and officials demonstrate, teach and encourage good sportsmanship?
- Were the officials fair and consistent in their rulings?
- Were the awards appropriate, and did they emphasize participation, skill improvement and teamwork?

Consider how the answers to those questions will affect your child's participation. Recognize what should be prioritized for you and your child and whether or not what the program offers will suit your needs. Remember that your child should have fun in a safe, participatory environment.

Resources

- Bunker, L.K., and Rotella, L.K. (1995). *Parenting your superstar*. Charlottesville, Va.: Links Press.
- Dougherty, IV, N., Ed. (2002). *Principles of safety in physical education and sport*. Reston, Va.: NASPE/AAHPERD.
- Lumpkin, A., Stoll, S.K., and Beller, J.M. (1994). *Sport ethics: Applications for fair play*. St. Louis, Mo.: Mosby-Year Book Inc.
- National Association for Sport and Physical Education. (2006). *Quality coaches, quality sports: National standards for sport coaches (2nd ed.)*. Reston, Va.: Author.
- Boyd, M. P., and Zhang Yin. 1996. Cognitive-affective sources of sport enjoyment in adolescent sport participants. *Adolescence* 31, 383-395.
- Chudacoff, Howard. 2007. *Children at play: An American history*. New York, N.Y.: New York University Press.
- Coakley, Jay. 1983. Play, games and sports: Developmental implications for young people. In J. C. Harris and R. J. Park, eds. *Play, games and sports in cultural contexts* (pp. 431-450). Champaign, Ill.: Human Kinetics.
- Coakley, Jay. 2006. The good father: Parental expectations and youth sports. *Leisure Studies* 25, 2: 153-164.
- Côté, Jean. 1999. The influence of the family in the development of talent in sport. *The Sport Psychologist* 13: 395-417.
- Côté, Jean. 2004. Education through sport participation: a developmental perspective. Launch of the European Year of Education Through Sport (EYES), Dublin, Ireland.
- Côté, Jean, and John Hay. 2002. Children's involvement in sport: a developmental perspective, in: J. M. Silva & D. E. Stevens (Eds) *Psychological foundations of sport* (pp. 484-502). Boston, Mass.: Allyn & Bacon.
- Elkind, David. 2008. *The power of play: Learning what comes naturally*. Da Capo Lifelong Books.
- Ewing, Martha E., and Vern Seefeldt. 1996. Patterns of participation and attrition in American agency-sponsored youth sports. Pp. 31-45 in F. L. Smoll and R. E. Smith, eds. *Children in sports: A biopsychosocial perspective*, Indianapolis, Ind.: Brown & Benchmark.
- Fraser-Thomas, Jessica L., Jean Côté, and Janice Deakin. 2005. Youth sport programs: an avenue to foster positive youth development. *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy* 10, 1: 19-40.
- Fraser-Thomas, Jessica L., and Jean Côté. 2006. Youth Sports: Implementing Findings and Moving Forward with Research. *Athletic Insight: The Online Journal of Sport Psychology*: www.athleticinsight.com/Vol8Iss3/YouthSports.htm.

- Kirk, D. 2005. Physical education, youth sport and lifelong participation: The importance of early learning experiences. *European Physical Education Review* 11, 239-255.
- Laumann, Silken. 2006. *Child's play: Rediscovering the joy of play in our families and our communities*. Toronto, Canada: Random House Canada.

Position Paper Revision Authors

Linda Lyman, University of the Pacific
Marty Ewing, Michigan State University
Nan Martino, Einstein High School (Md.)

Original Position Paper Authors

Gib Darden, Coastal Carolina University
Greg Dale, Duke University
Christine Tinberg, Pepperdine University

National Association for Sport and Physical Education

An association of the
American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance
1900 Association Drive
Reston, Va. 20191
(p) 703-476-3410
(f) 703-476-8316
<http://www.naspeinfo.org/>

Suggested Citation:

National Association for Sport and Physical Education. (2009). Choosing the right sport and physical activity program for your child [Position statement]. Reston, Va.: Author.