

Why Children Play Sport

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Children play sport for a variety of reasons. Most commonly they do it because they enjoy it. Once enjoyment of participation goes, so does their interest in continuing the sport. However, enjoyment can come from a variety of sources. For example, it can come from:

- Learning new skills
- Improving skills
- Participating in a range of fun activities
- Having a good relationship with a coach
- Being recognised by being selected for competition or to demonstrate to others
- Being involved in exciting and close contests
- Being with friends
- Being identified with a group whom they respect and whose company they like
- Being able to do something well
- Achieving challenging tasks and performing at one's personal best
- The desire to be fit and healthy
- Being involved in a well organised physical activity
- Being given positive feedback, encouragement and/or awards
- Being part of a friendly, good humoured and caring group of people
- Feeling safe, secure and being treated with respect

To maintain their interest in playing sport children need to be able to learn the skills required and do this in an environment that values them as an individual. Poor coaching may lead to player frustration and self-doubt and can promote a sense of inadequacy or failure.

Characteristics of children

All children are different. The AusTouch program caters for boys and girls aged between eight and 18 years. Coaches, teachers and AusTouch Leaders need to be aware of the physical, emotional, social and skill learning characteristics that may differentiate children from one another, and the impact this has for their role.

The most fundamental issue is that children develop at different rates and that the range of difference can be very significant. Being sensitive to and making appropriate allowances for individual differences is an essential part of coaching or teaching.

Physical differences in children

- Some children have delayed growth, some grow at an average rate and others have accelerated growth
- Children of a younger age are generally less coordinated than older children
- Children of the same age can differ significantly in physical characteristics (eg. children can differ in height by 40% and be four years apart in physical development) and capabilities
- Girls tend to develop physically at a faster rate than boys do
- Children who mature early are usually successful at sport in their younger years, but this success may not necessarily continue through adolescence with most of those who mature later catching them up
- As children mature their hand/foot/eye coordination improves. Younger children (possibly up to age eight) are starting to acquire
- appropriate coordination skills and generally will not be able to perform activities requiring well-developed hand/foot/eye coordination