

When should my child start some form of formalised physical training?

The answer is simple; if a child is ready to participate in sport, they are ready to engage in some form of physical training. This doesn't mean young children should follow adult-based training programs. Young and inexperienced children should first learn how to control their own bodyweight, using fun-based activities targeted at improving coordination, motor skills, and muscle strength. However, with improvements in technical competency, increased strength, and greater psychological and social maturity, young people should be encouraged to participate in more recognised forms of physical training, involving a range of resistance training equipment situated within appropriate training facilities.

“Take advantage of being young”

During childhood, young children experience rapid developments in their neuromuscular systems. At this age, it is easier for young children to learn new skills. By exposing children to appropriate physical training from an early age, they are more likely to develop higher levels of motor skill competency.

“Long-term gains, not, short-term wins”

Although all young people can make worthwhile gains in physical performance in response to physical training programmes, training should never be designed to achieve short-term gains in performance at the expense of technical competency or health and wellbeing of your child.

“Help the pursuit of developmental milestones”

Much like reading and writing, basic motor skills such as jumping, running, and throwing are learned behaviours and require practice. Physical training can help your child attain these developmental milestones, and early mastery can help young people become more efficient “movers” later in life.

“Variety is the spice of life”

Children should be encouraged to participate in a variety of sports during their growing years to positively influence the development of a diverse range of motor skills. By developing a breadth and depth of motor skills, children who go on to become young athletes will have greater athleticism and be less likely to get injured.

Based on:

Lloyd, R.S. et al. (2016). National Strength and Conditioning Association position statement on long-term athletic development. *Journal of Strength and Conditioning Research*, 30(6), 1491-1509