



DR. K'S MENTAL MINUTE
THE ATHLETIC MIND INSTITUTE

Getting Your Child Started in Sports

By Todd M. Kays, Ph.D.

Sport Psychologist

Most parents face the inevitable questions of when they should let their child begin playing sports and in what exact sport they should participate. Sport is one of the greatest teachers in life. Children and adolescents learn valuable lessons in athletics that they can learn in few other environments this early in life. Children learn teamwork, communication skills, self-esteem, honesty, sportsmanship, discipline, hard work and handling adversity. Thus, the first point is that getting children involved in sports - regardless of what sport it might be - is extremely beneficial to their physical, emotional, social and life development.

A second point is determining when a child is ready to play organized sports. Part of the answer to this question is the interest level of the child. Some kids want to play sports as early as 4 or 5 years old, while others may not develop this interest until later. Also, some sports lend themselves better to youth and are more accessible, such as soccer or baseball. Observe your child and see what sports – whether by playing or watching – they have an interest and simply ask if they would like to participate in this sport (make sure the sport is available in your area as well as being certain *you* are ready as a parent - certain sports that have higher financial and time investment than others).

Thirdly, expose your child to many different sports. They may not end up liking a certain sport, but at least they tried. The same is true for other activities, such as music and art – kids need to be exposed to these experiences as a way to explore their interest and ability levels. Regardless of the sport, even if the child ends up not liking it, they will still have learned the valuable lesson of being part of a team and the many wonderful experiences that come along with it. Furthermore, many people talk about children specializing in one sport, but this event should not happen until *at least* ages 11-12. They can have a primary sport before this age, but the lessons and cross training that take place in other sports are invaluable.

The fourth point is to find a league or coach that is consistent with your approach to sports. For example, some teams and coaches may be more competitive than you or your child want. If this is the case, find a team or coach that supports a more social view of sports. You and your child's approach to sports and coaching will inevitably change, but when first beginning, make certain you and your child's motivation for playing sports is consistent with the team and/or coach.

A fifth and final point is to have fun when you are at your child's sporting events. Sports can be competitive and FUN! If you are having fun at a game, then your child will have more fun. The reverse is also true – if you are not having fun, your child will notice this fact and it could take away from his or her own enjoyment. Thus, have a great

time watching your kids grow and develop in sports!!

Five Points

- Sports Teach Children Valuable Life Lessons
- Ask Your Child If He or She is Ready to Play Organized Sport
- Expose Your Children to a Variety of Sports and Other Activities
- Find a Team and Coach Consistent with You and Your Child's Approach
- HAVE FUN!

Play Hard, Play Smart and Play Well!