



GO!D SPORTS

GUIDE FOR COACHES

THE GOOD SPORTS SPINE

Take a moment and think back to when you were a child playing sport. What did you enjoy about playing sport back then? It might have been the thrill of competing, it might have been that you were playing with your friends, it could have been that you learned how to kick a spiral punt, or maybe it was the half time oranges. The key thing is that what you enjoyed about sport as a child was probably unique to you and this hasn't changed – each child is different. So, what makes a child have a quality sporting experience and ultimately fall in love with sport?

The Holistic Needs of a Child in Sport

The Good Sports Spine recognises a holistic approach to the needs of a child in sport is essential; consider their physical; social and emotional; cognitive; and spiritual needs. When taking into account what we've seen in sport with our study of the research there are five things that have been shown to most affect the quality of their experience in sports and this is what you need to focus on.

1) Inspiration

No one wants to feel like they aren't good enough and can't do it. This can kill spirit and make a child lose interest. At the same time, activities and exercises that are too easy can quickly become boring. Children need challenges that aren't too easy or too hard and the feeling that with effort, good things will come.

2) Connection

It is very important that children feel a sense of belonging to the group both on and off the court/field. This means that they feel liked by the coach, have friends on the team and have a role to play in the game. Crucially, children need to feel loved and supported by their parents (regardless of the result).

3) Empowerment

Who likes being told what to do all the time? When children feel trusted and their feelings and ideas are valued, they are more likely to feel self-reliant and self-directed.

4) Play

Children need to play games! Games are best when they challenge movement, teamwork and imagination in new and exciting ways. Research tells us that play does more than 'just give children a chance to run around' (even though that is important). Play is key to a deeper learning of the sport, injury prevention and long-term development.

5) Variety

Children need a chance to try out a few different sports before deciding which one to focus on. Research shows that year-round training, in a single sport to the exclusion of others, can make children susceptible to overuse injury, burnout and disaffection with that sport.

In the same way a healthy spine maintains the body, the health of these five needs shapes a child's motivation, confidence, learning and enjoyment and the quality of the experience, leading to their love of sport.



The Environment We Create

As a coach in a child's life, your behaviour matters. Through your daily actions, you can do things that support and/or undermine a child's experiences and their needs for development. We've found that the attitudes and behaviours of adults in children's sports tend to cluster into two patterns that we call (1) a Climate of Development and (2) a Climate of Performance. We use the term climates because we're talking about the environment that surrounds a child.

Climate of Development

This climate is most likely to support children's needs and creates engagement, interest and learning, but ultimately supports children to develop a love of sport. Focusing on effort and improvement encourages children to strive to play hard and focus on developing to please themselves as oppose to others. It also supports children to develop resilience as mistakes become something to learn from.

Climate of Performance

Being within this climate you work against what children need and increase the chances of losing interest, burnout and overuse injury. Correcting every mistake has a way of making children feel like they aren't good enough. While adults who focus on performance tend to focus on the 'best' at the exclusion of others.

As a coach, you have a duty of care to the children you coach, which includes their physical, mental, emotional and social well-being. Your #1 job is to provide a quality experience that means kids keep coming back!

We have created a tool that will help you as an adult take a step back and reflect on the bigger questions; am I helping a child have a quality sporting experience and am I helping children fall in love with sport? The Good Sports Spine looks to help you answer these questions. The Good Sports Spine is a great tool for reflecting on what kind of environment you're promoting in children's sports. As a coach you should use this tool to guide how you coach.





**Tell me, I'll forget
Show me, I'll remember
Involve me, I'll understand**

One model that can help you put the Goods Spine into practice
is the Sport New Zealand Let Me Play model...



A model for helping parents
and coaches work better
with young people.



Give me the time and
opportunity to play.



Just let me have a go,
have fun and work it
out for myself.



Be there, be interested
and understand me.



Give me the support I need
so I can work it out and feel
proud of what I can do.

