

BUILDING LONG-TERM ATHLETIC DEVELOPMENT



LEARN ABOUT AGE AND STAGE OF ATHLETIC DEVELOPMENT

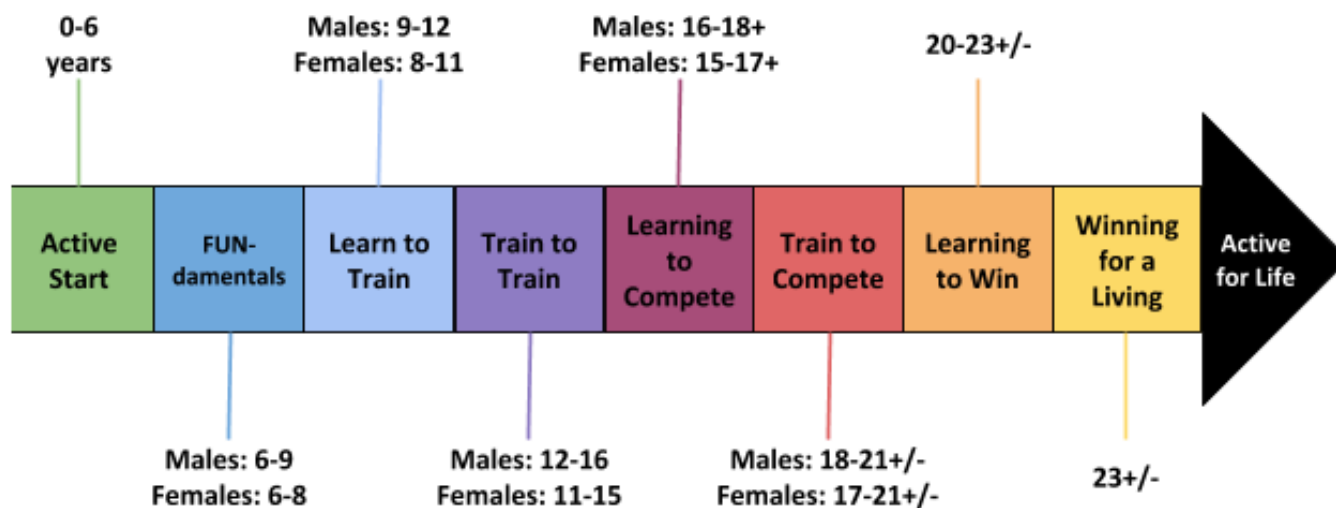
ATHLETIC DEVELOPMENT IS INDIVIDUAL AND NEEDS SYSTEMATIC PROGRESSION

COMMUNICATION IS KEY AMONGST ALL MEMBERS OF THE ATHLETE'S SUPPORT TEAM

Different periods of a child's life have a great impact on how we should be coaching and nurturing their development. We work hard to help set children up for success by understanding the different phases of maturation, while coaching to push their potential.

Today, using Athletics Canada's long-term athletic development model, we will discuss more generally the different stages children enter. However, it is important to remember that the process of athletic development is very individualized, making communication key. Let's get to understand our athletes, what motivates them, what they respond to, and how they recover, so we can give them what they need to pursue their performance goals.

Athletics Canada's Long-Term Athletic Development Model



Active Start

During childhood, we want kids to move and play. Activity should be encouraged so they learn to interact with their surroundings and begin to develop body awareness and sensory integration. Most importantly, this play should be fun and varied in nature! The more directions and ways a child moves, the greater body awareness they develop.



It is important to acknowledge not all kids enjoy sports themselves, and that is okay! The emphasis is making physical activity fun, which is why individualized care and is beneficial. The key is finding the physical activity your child enjoys, so they can develop bone and muscle strength, methods to promote healthy blood pressure, cholesterol levels, and promote confidence and self-esteem.

FUN-damentals

As children grow older, they enter a stage where they start to improve their body control, balance, and develop their natural athleticism. As early as ages 7 and 8, it can be safe to expose kids to "training," as long as it is age appropriate, progressive, and monitored. Done properly, training can increase your child's strength and endurance, help protect your child's muscles and joints from sports-related injuries, aid in improving your child's performance through improved body awareness, coordination, and balance, and develop movement patterns that your child will continue to use as he or she grows older.

Learn to Train

During this time, you want to continue developing the basic skills mentioned above. Structured programs start to emphasize technique, while integrating physical, mental, and cognitive challenges. Various strength, plyometrics, speed, and balance are components that should be included, however, don't forget that making it FUN still matters! Sports specialization is not encouraged yet because kids are still growing and benefit from staying balanced in different movement patterns and muscle groups.



Train to Train

As athletes start to mature, training becomes more focused on athletics, specific skills, and fitness the child needs to excel in their interests. During times of growth, natural athleticism can appear to drop, movement patterns seem abnormal, and performance can sometimes decrease. Working with a team who understands the exciting potential of growth, as well as the vulnerabilities that can be exposed at this time, can make this transition phase easier. Planning how much the child is doing in terms of their athletics, training, school work, and social life become important. Having a plan (more to come on this in next week's article!) is crucial to supporting the child's physical, mental, and emotional needs. We need to respect when a child becomes overloaded and when it is okay to push him or her. It is important not to compare to what the child used to be able to do, or plan too far as to what we think they should be able to do. Growth and maturation follows every child's own personal path. We need to support them on theirs in the moment!.



Learning to Compete

At this point, most athletes have started to dedicate themselves to specific sports and activities. Different components of competing have bigger influences on the big picture, such as sport specific strengths and weaknesses, coach and teammate relationships, pressure and excitement from competition, and more. The athletic calendar and athlete's goals should be taken into account to help manage training gains to allow the athlete to recover and grow effectively. Training components should account for the specific skills, physical imbalances an athlete is presenting with, and reactive/decision making components needed in competition. At this point, we encourage young athletes to take ownership of their athletic journey, empowering them to develop their own physical and health literacy to help us plan for what they need. In addition, utilizing mental skills and nutrition coaching can benefit the well-rounded experience of competing at the highest level.

The steps beyond the ones mentioned above become very person-specific. Athletic careers, goals, and roads begin to look different person to person. College and professional athletics are possibilities for some, while others will learn to transition out of sport to become healthy, active adults. In both scenarios, support continues to be needed. The transition out of sports can be difficult for a variety of reasons and understanding this transition process can help those feeling lost, when an identity they always had is no longer there. For those continuing to compete, the ultimate goal of the athlete's performance team is to ensure they are prepared for competition, recover appropriately, and prolong their career as best as they can at the highest level possible. Athletes often have a team at this point, including coaches, trainers, sports-medicine, psychologists, agents, etc. Communication amongst team members becomes essential and having the athlete's trust sets all members up for success. This is why we work hard to establish relationships with our young athletes, so we can be there for them throughout their career, always having their best interests in mind.

ATHLETIC DEVELOPMENT IS SOMETHING WE TAKE GREAT INTEREST IN AT MOMENTUM. A LONG AND HEALTHY ATHLETIC CAREER IS POSSIBLE IN SPORTS! HOWEVER, WE CAN SOMETIMES SEE IT GET DERAILED WHEN DIFFERENT COMPONENTS OF THE ATHLETIC DEVELOPMENT MODEL BECOME UNBALANCED. TEACHING YOUNG ATHLETES WHAT THEIR BODY IS TELLING THEM SETS UP THE PATTERN OF COMMUNICATION THAT IS NEEDED TO HELP THEM THRIVE. WE ARE HERE TO WORK WITH YOUR ATHLETES TO NAVIGATE THE PEAKS, SETBACKS, AND PLATEAUS OF THE JOURNEY. WE KNOW IT ISN'T ALWAYS EASY, BUT THE ROAD OF ATHLETICS IS WORTH TRAVELING. LET US KNOW HOW WE CAN HELP!