



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT®
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

PARTICIPATION BY CHILDREN IN ORGANIZED YOUTH SPORTS PROGRAMS

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Links of Interest

<http://aappolicy.aapublications.org/cgi/reprint/pediatrics;107/6/1459.pdf> For a copy of the American Academy of Pediatrics' policy on "Organized Sports for Children and Preadolescents."

Statement of the YMCA of the USA Health, Risk, and Safety Advisory Committee (HRSAC)

Organized sports programs for children should be developmentally appropriate—responsive to the physical, emotional, social, and cognitive stages of childhood as determined by both age and individual readiness. Leaders and coaches should be aware of appropriate behaviors and activities for specific age groups and familiar with methods of accommodating children with special needs. Although each child's preferences, abilities, patterns of growth, and experiences will vary, the Y's ultimate goal should be to make every child feel important and welcome in these programs.

YMCA sports programs should avoid treating children as if they are miniature adults. Coaches should avoid placing undue stress on children by pushing them beyond their abilities. Programs should be progressive in design, fun, and enjoyable—supporting and enhancing each stage of growth and building on what has been learned in earlier stages. The Y agrees with the American Academy of Pediatrics, which states that game rules should be modified to accommodate the child's need to learn or should be adapted to age-appropriate skills or fitness, and if possible, participants should be grouped according to size, skill, and maturation level rather than age. Using these general guidelines, the following is recommended:

1. For children up to approximately 5 years of age, YMCA programs should emphasize fundamental motor skills such as catching, kicking, swinging, running, and bouncing. Organized teams and leagues are not recommended for this age group.
2. For children between approximately 5 and 8 years of age, YMCA programs should continue to focus on motor skills and begin the transition to more organized games and play, introduced for selected sports, with modified equipment, playing areas, and simple rules that contribute to cooperation rather than competition. Sports programs for this age group should not include scoring of events or highly organized, competitive teams.

3. For children between approximately 8 and 12 years of age, YMCA programs should emphasize a wide variety of individual and team sports, with skill development that encourages a lifetime of enjoyment. Organized teams and leagues are appropriate, with emphasis on development of basic skills, learning rules and strategies, having fun, and appreciation for lifetime participation in sport and fitness activities.
4. For children approximately 12 years of age and older, YMCAs should provide sports programs that encourage all youth to continue participating, as well as highly competitive teams and leagues that encourage young participants to become the best they can be.
5. For all children, YMCAs should pay careful attention to the factors that may contribute to overuse injuries in young athletes, such as the volume and progression rate of training, playing surfaces, and footwear. It is recommended that YMCAs monitor the rate of progression and volume of training in the athletes participating in their sports programs. It is recommended that the amount of training be increased by no more than 10 percent per week. Coaches should be conscious of behaviors or limitations to participation that children may have and speak to the parents to about potential problems. Individuals should be referred to appropriate medical personnel for treatment. These conditions can usually be corrected through simple exercises or orthotic devices.
6. Proper nutrition is essential for the healthy growth and development of young people. YMCA sports programs are encouraged to include a curriculum that promotes proper nutrition and stresses healthy food choices. In addition, food and/or snacks provided for youth should be done in a responsible manner by avoiding high-fat, high-sugar products and choosing complex carbohydrates instead (see YMCA of the USA Health, Risk, and Safety Advisory Committee, "Promoting Healthy Nutrition for Youth in YMCA Programs").

YMCA sports programs for children should focus on the development of healthy lifestyles, the values of cooperation and fair play, the involvement of parents in positive support roles, and individual children rather than the sport. Children with special needs should be individually assessed to determine what accommodations are necessary to integrate them into the YMCA sports programs. Coaches and other leaders should be carefully selected and trained to assure that programs are developmentally appropriate, contribute to YMCA goals for children and families, and reflect the organization's mission that everyone, regardless of sex, race, national origin, religion, or physical ability, is welcome to participate.

