

GOOD SPORTS SPINE

WHAT IS IT?

The Good Sports Spine is a tool to help parents, coaches, teachers and sport administrators understand how they impact children's sport experiences. The two different 'climates' should be seen as opposite ends of a continuum. To support children to have positive sporting experiences, adults should aim to always fall under the Climate of Development.

WHY IS IT NEEDED?

When examining how much a child enjoys their experiences in sport, research shows that the adults who support and impact those experiences, are hugely influential. Unfortunately, a lot of adults (even despite the best of intent) behave in ways that have a negative impact on children's experiences in sport.

Think of the Good Sports Spine as a map that lays out a range of common adult behaviours in youth sports and their relationship to children's needs. This mapping serves an important purpose: it helps us to chart the course for change which underpins the mission of the Good Sports project. On this map you will find two major zones: (1) the Climate of Performance and (2) Climate of Development. Simply put, we believe that those operating primarily in a Climate of performance must collectively shift to a Climate of Development in order to minimize the downsides and maximize the benefits of sport. Our core position reads like this:

HOW TO USE IT?

Adults should use the Good Sports Spine as a guide to think about their interactions with children in sport and their decisions that affect children in sport.

1. Read through the Good Sports Spine and think about your role or roles as an adult involved in children's sport (e.g. parent, coach, teacher and/or sport administrator).
2. Reflect on your past experiences and try plot where you think you sat on each of the rungs on the Good Sports Spine for that experiences.
3. If you were to move more towards the Climate of Development what is one behaviour you might change?
4. Think about some future scenarios that you may encounter in your role in children's sport. How might you now act or think differently?

GOOD SPORTS SPINE[®]

UNDERSTANDING THE NEEDS OF CHILDREN IN SPORT

Below you will find more detail about the key needs of children in sport, as identified in the Good Sports Spine.

INSPIRATION

No one wants to feel like they aren't good enough and can't do it. This can kill spirits 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.

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)

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.

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 giving 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.

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.

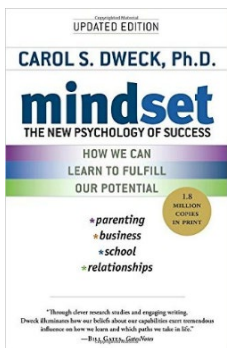
GOOD SPORTS SPINE

BEHIND THE SPINE

Good Sports places a high importance on developing tools that are supported by theory and evidence. For this reason, we've drawn upon our study of research into education, psychology, coaching theory, youth development and public policy. In this section, we share the academic basis for our approach. In particular, we outline three frameworks that played a key role in shaping our formulation of the Good Sports Spine: Need Satisfaction, Growth Mindset and the Developmental Model of Sports Participation.

NEED SATISFACTION

As humans, we have a natural tendency to seek challenge and desire growth. We find interest in new and exciting activities that test us in interesting ways. We play games, try new sports, learn skills and set goals just beyond our current ability. However, our motivation to continue isn't guaranteed. Researchers of Self Determination Theory find that our intrinsic motivation persists when, through interaction with others, our innate psychological needs are satisfied. These innate psychological needs are identified as **Competence, Relatedness and Autonomy**.

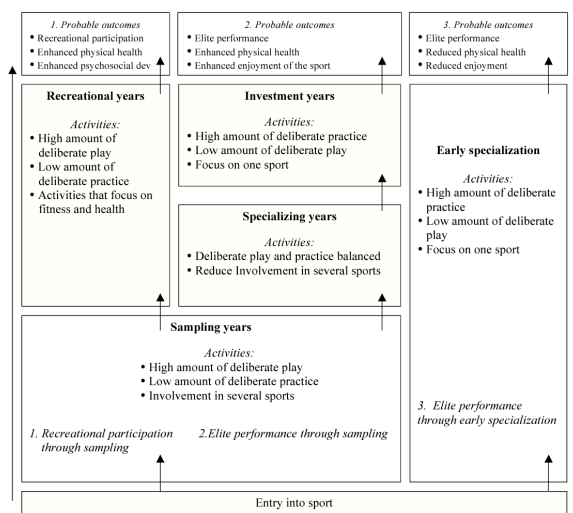


GROWTH MINDSET

Even when intrinsically motivated, progress can stall in the face of difficulty. For this reason, we require a mental toolkit that can help us persist in the search for solutions. Through studies across education, business and family, psychologist Carol Dweck studied how we make sense of adversity and developed a framework that distinguishes what she terms the Growth and Fixed Mindsets. Those who demonstrate a growth mindset tend to view intelligence, talent and ability not as fixed, but changeable through effort. They define success in reference to their own self-improvement; mistakes are simply challenges to be overcome, not proof of one's inability in comparison to others

DEVELOPMENTAL MODEL OF SPORTS PARTICIPATION (DMSP)

Because competitive sport clearly defines winners and losers, it is easy to understand how many adults make definitions of success in terms of performance outcomes. In our desire to stand atop the podium, earn selection to the top teams and score the most points, we start the specialisation process earlier – quitting other sports in pursuit of just one so that we can put in the long, hard hours necessary to become a champion. Unfortunately, associating success too closely with performance outcomes (e.g. win/loss, rankings, selection, points scored, etc.) sport can become destructive to young bodies due to overtraining and overuse, while also neglecting less tangible but important alternative definitions of success: finding sporting activities we truly enjoy; cultivating a total athleticism and skill-set that transfers across sports; participating into adulthood and old age; keeping active but injury free; and developing a healthy view of competition.



The Developmental Model of Sports Participation (DMSP) attempts to reconcile these conflicting pathways. While acknowledging the place of elite sport in athlete development, they keep it in proper context. Elite sport training and competition must be developmentally appropriate; reserved for post-puberty time periods when an athlete is socially, emotionally, cognitively and physically ready. In childhood and early adolescence, we should prioritize play, experimenting with different sports and fostering a love for sport and physical activity.