



An Introduction for Parents

ASPIRE TO SUCCEED

WHAT IS LONG-TERM ATHLETIC DEVELOPMENT?

What does long-term athletic development (LTAD) mean and how can parents get more involved with their child's athletic development? Rick Howard provides an overview of youth development, important concepts to understand, ways to impact physical development, signs of overtraining and further resources that are a great refresher for coaches and can be passed onto parents.

In recent years, there has been growing interest and support in the world of youth physical fitness and sports for models of development that help athletes of all ages realize their full athletic potential and put the individual on a path to a lifelong commitment to a healthy lifestyle. One of the main concepts behind all of this is the idea of long-term athletic development, or LTAD.

LTAD is a youth-centered approach to physical activity and development. The concept is focused on meeting the needs of children at any developmental level to promote fun, positive sports and fitness experiences which in turn help set the foundation for a lifetime commitment to healthy activities.

So, what does all this mean and how do parents get more involved with their child's athletic development? To help answer these questions and more, the NSCA reached out to Rick Howard, MEd, CSCS,*D, a leading expert in the field of LTAD.

KEY CONCEPTS OF LTAD

that Rick suggests all parents should know:

1. LTAD is a guideline, not an absolute mandate. Children develop at different rates and not always in a positive direction, so adjustments must be made based on their individual development to get the best results.

2. LTAD promotes multisport participation, youth health and well-being, and positive youth development. LTAD is more than a model of youth sports participation; it promotes development of the whole child with the child at the center and sports participation as the key.

3. LTAD should begin during early childhood to give youth the greatest opportunity for success. The concept of physical literacy, which helps youngsters value and take personal responsibility for their participation, may be necessary so that they reach an appropriate level of proficiency. Think of it like subjects in school – the later students learn the basic concepts, the more difficult it is to master the subject.

4. All fitness attributes are trainable across childhood (ages 6-11 or 12) and adolescence (ages 11 or 12 through 17). Health fitness attributes (aerobic endurance, muscle strength, muscle endurance, flexibility) as well as skills fitness (agility, balance, coordination, power, speed) all are safe to train under proper supervision with a developmentally appropriate progressed program design.

5. Many organizations now stand behind the major underpinnings of LTAD. Organizations such as the National Strength and Conditioning Association, the International Olympic Committee, the United States Olympic & Paralympic Committee and their national governing bodies have issued materials promoting the benefits of LTAD.

6. Biological age is not always the best determinant of sport readiness. Sport readiness considers the complex interaction of the biological, social, physical, physiological and psychological domains for performance. Each domain does not necessarily develop at the same rate as the others.



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7. Youth sports programs should focus on talent development throughout childhood and adolescence. Not all youths develop at the same rate. Some are “early maturers” who are most often selected at younger ages but may burn out or suffer overuse injuries. “Late maturers,” on the other hand, if not given continued opportunity to improve, will never develop to their potential.

8. The misconception still exists that youth should not strength train. Strength training is safe and effective for youth and should be properly integrated into a sports participation program.

5 STAGES TO A BETTER SPORT EXPERIENCE

The American Development Model is meant to explain an athlete's advancement through a pathway supporting a healthy sport experience based on their physical, mental and emotional level and potential for growth.



FUNDAMENTAL LTAD QUESTIONS

To help parents better understand the implications of LTAD in their child's development, we ask Rick to further explain some fundamental questions.

What are some examples of recreational physical activities that a parent can do at home with a young child (under 2) that will make a positive impact on their development?

The best way to stimulate your child to develop positive health behaviors at a very young age is for you to engage in a healthy lifestyle and take the time to share time with your child being physically active. Some helpful ideas of activities with your kids include:

- Be a role model develop an appreciation for being active outdoors
- Learn to enjoy physical activity by trying a variety of activities
- Create a supportive and fun atmosphere for being active

Examples of what parents can do at home with a young child under 2 include:

- Explore your backyard by walking and playing. Have fun by hopping like a frog, doing bear crawls and inchworms.
- Use toys such as light balls or balloons to encourage fundamental motor skills like throwing, catching and kicking.
- Encourage toddlers to not be inactive for more than one hour at a time except when sleeping.



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What should I do if my child isn't developing physical literacy at the same rate as their peers?

There are two things to be aware of:

1. Growth and development are not necessarily linear. At all stages of development, adequate opportunities to develop all 10 fitness attributes and fundamental motor skills are critical.
2. Not all coaches have an LTAD approach to youth development. If the focus is on winning and not skill development of all team members, physical literacy is probably not part of the coach's game plan.

If your child does not seem to be developing at the same rate as their peers:

- Check with your child's pediatrician to see if he/she is growing at the appropriate rate for his/her age.
- Ensure that your child is receiving adequate sleep and nutrition.
- Provide at least 60 minutes every day for your child to be physically active in structured and unstructured play.
- Encourage your child to continue to participate in sports and other physical activities to continue to develop all fitness attributes.

What are the attributes of a good coach or physical educator?

The top 10 attributes of a good coach/physical educator:

1. Child-centered and understands youth physical and psychosocial development
2. Promotes physical literacy and LTAD
3. Good communicator
4. Does not use exercise as punishment
5. Promotes teamwork

6. Is organized and has a structured season practice plan
7. Participates in professional development and has a nationally accredited certification
8. Appreciates parents
9. Is a positive role model
10. Teaches and coaches

What are the signs of overtraining and what can I do to help my child-athlete avoid this while remaining active in their sport(s)?

Signs of overtraining are not always obvious, but may include:

- Being more tired or irritable than usual
- Not looking forward to practice/games
- Increase in injuries
- Decrease in performance

Be careful to evaluate the "big picture" as overtraining can be part of:

- Playing one sport more than one season, or for too long a season
- Playing more than one sport per season, or is on more than one team of the same sport in one season
- Increased cumulative stressors from school, sports, friends, etc.

To help reduce the risk of overtraining:

- Spend no more time per week in sports as his/her age in years. For example, a 10-year-old child should spend no more than 10 hours per week in sports practice and play.
- Monitor your child's schedule of sports, school, and other activities.
- Provide breaks from structured sports and activities to let kids be kids.