
FIRST STEPS IN BUILDING AN ATHLETE FOR LIFE

FOR KIDS (AGES 0-5) NOT YET INVOLVED IN SPORT PROGRAMS

Parents and caregivers today are bombarded with conflicting messages about when and how to introduce children to sport activity. Ten questions to ask of yourself and local programs:

- 1. HAVE I TALKED WITH MY CHILD'S PEDIATRICIAN ABOUT SPORTS?**

The American Academy of Pediatrics offers evidence-based guidance on a range of topics related to sports safety and physical activity for children. Ask what type of activities are advisable to introduce at each stage of development.
- 2. WITH INFANTS, AM I ENCOURAGING SKILL DEVELOPMENT IN MOVEMENT?**

Humans are wired to move. Reaching and grasping, pulling and pushing, moving the head, torso and limbs – all of it helps develop the relationship between the brain and body. Interact with your child and offer effusive praise.
- 3. WITH TODDLERS, AM I PROVIDING AN APPROPRIATE MIX OF PLAY ENVIRONMENTS?**

The guidelines for this age group are at least 30 minutes of structured physical activity each day, plus anywhere from 60 minutes to several hours of unstructured play. Toddlers should not be sedentary for more than 60 minutes at a time, except when sleeping.
- 4. HAVE I ENROLLED MY CHILD IN A LEARN-TO-SWIM CLASS?**

Kids love to get wet. And for a child who is proficient in the water, a world of lifetime sport options open up: snorkeling, rowing, kayaking, surfing, standup paddleboard, water skiing, sailing, triathlon, swim team, among others.
- 5. HAVE I IDENTIFIED SAFE PLACES TO PLAY IN MY COMMUNITY?**

People living within a mile of a park are four times more likely to use it than others. When choosing a home, take an inventory of nearby assets that promote active play: sidewalks, bike paths, playgrounds, and school facilities.
- 6. IS MY PRESCHOOLER IN PROGRAMS THAT PRIORITIZE PHYSICAL LITERACY?**

Physical literacy is the ability, confidence and desire to be active for life. One key is the development of fundamental movement skills – agility, balance, coordination. Certainly before age 5, it's not about teaching sport-specific skills.

7. DOES MY CHILD'S PRESCHOOL ENCOURAGE LEARNING THROUGH PLAY?

Through kindergarten in Finland, teachers hold off on academic drilling and mostly ask kids to play in settings where they can solve problems. Finland's students end up with some of the highest math scores in the world.

8. HAVE I POPULATED OUR HOME WITH TOYS THAT ENCOURAGE MOVEMENT?

Provide a child with the tools to play, on their own terms (not those of adults), and often they will. Free play builds physical literacy and love of game, with intrinsic rewards that encourage further engagement.

9. DO I UNDERSTAND AMERICAN DEVELOPMENT MODEL PRINCIPLES?

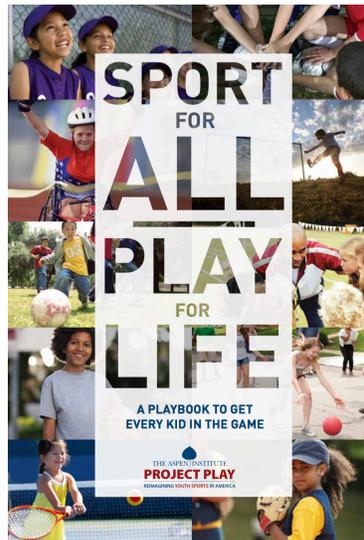
ADM is a framework designed by the US Olympic Committee that describes the five stages for proper athletic development. From ages 0 to 12, it's "Discover, Learn & Play." ADM debunks myths. From the start, get smart.

10. HAVE I IDENTIFIED WHAT BENEFITS I HOPE MY CHILD DERIVES FROM SPORTS?

Start with the end in mind, then design backwards. If it's a sports experience that develops social-emotional skills and healthy habits for life, resist the manic chase for the athletic scholarship and pro salaries. Elite performance cannot be manufactured.

SCORE/BOXES CHECKED:

- 9-10 = Ideal scenario for kids
- 6-8 = Solid foundation
- 3-5 = Much more can be done
- 1-2 = Much more should be done



Questions distilled from *Sport for All, Play for Life: A Playbook to Get Every Kid in the Game*, by the Aspen Institute's Project Play, which developed its framework with input from 300+ thought leaders.

Additional experts and resources were consulted in the development of the checklists. Background on and resources supporting the checklists are at: www.projectplay.us