

Benefits of Sports Participation on Youth development

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Research has detailed many benefits associated with participation in organized youth sports. Specific benefits of sports participation are developed physical skills that contribute to a lifetime of physical involvement, improved fitness, learn social and emotional skills, develop moral values, and acquire a better sense of self through increased perceived competence, self-esteem, and self-confidence (1). Sports participation also provides safe environments for youth to engage in constructive activities. Research also shows that young people who participate in athletics get better grades, devote more hours to studying, think more about their future, aspire to attend and graduate from college, and have lower suspension and expulsion rates (2).

Reports on physical activity and health, identify physical inactivity as a serious health problem on society (1). Lack of physical activity has clearly been shown to be a risk factor for cardiovascular disease and other conditions: Less active and less fit people have a greater risk of developing high blood pressure, obesity, increase the risk of certain cancers, and can add to feelings of anxiety and depression. (3).

Evidence supports the inclusion of regular physical activity as a tool for the prevention of chronic disease and the enhancement of overall health (4). Sports participation and athletic training help to establish healthy living and promote physical fitness. Physical fitness activities will combat chronic disease and illness, such as reducing the risk of cardiovascular disease, reduce the risk of type 2 diabetes and metabolic syndrome, improve mental health and mood, increase the chances of living longer, and many other health benefits (5). Youth sports facilitates opportunities for youth to engage in healthy activities, through the physical exertion sports participation requires. Regular sports practice and games provide youth with ample opportunity to engage in physical fitness activities which contribute to positive health conditions.

It has been suggested that children who participate in sport and achieve greater levels of motor skill competence during childhood and adolescence will remain active participants in physical activity into adulthood (6). There is a correlation between developing motor skill competence and its impact on physical activity and obesity. These early habits established as children and adolescence help to lay a foundation for a lifetime of physical activity and healthy living.

Sports participation can also have positive impacts on social development of youth. Organized youth sports instill confidence in young athletes to be part of a team and to make new friends in a safe environment (2). Participating in high quality organized activities affords youth the opportunity to form supportive and caring relationships with adults in the wider community who can provide them with social capital (7). Many youth coaches instill principals of discipline, accountability, and provide structure that some children lack at home. Competitive sports can also provide opportunity and exposure to travel they may not otherwise experience.

There are several reasons why participation in organized sports activities may be particularly important during adolescence years. First, in early adolescence youth are beginning to make their

own decisions about how to spend their free time, and these choices can have important implications for their future developmental trajectories. Second, as middle school youth begin to individuate from parents, they seek emotional support from caring non-familial adults (6). Positive adult role models are crucial during the adolescent years, and sport coaches provide a positive example and guidance for many children.

A Women's Sports Foundation survey found that high school athletes have higher grades and lower dropout rates than non-athletes. (8) Student Athletes are motivated to perform academically to maintain eligibility to compete in high school sports programs. A study from the University of Kansas suggests that there's universal way to motivate students: Give them a reason to come to school—even if that reason has nothing to do with academics. When a student must earn the right to play a sport by performing in the classroom, that is a very strong factor in keeping adolescents in school. (9)

Sport helps youths to become better contributors to society. Involvement in sport helps youth to improve their social interaction, increase their confidence, and improve their listening skills and health. Participation in sport is linked to higher grades, lower dropout rate, reduced truancy. Academic and athletic success can motivate student athletes to pursue college opportunities. College, for many, may not be an option without athletics. College can provide access to upward social and financial mobility for many student athletes.

In addition to the physical and social benefits, those involved with sport had higher rates of self-knowledge and emotional regulation than those involved with other activities. Research discovered that sports participation is associated with significantly better health outcomes, including higher healthy self-image and lower risk of emotional distress, suicidal behavior and substance abuse (10). Studies included a survey of US high school students, in which participation in team sport was associated with lower general risk-taking and fewer mental health problems compared with non-participation. In studies, team sport involvement was positively associated with social acceptance and negatively associated with depressive symptoms. Benefits from team sport may be related to the effect of positive experiences with coaches, skill development, peer support, enhanced perception in social acceptance and reducing body dissatisfaction (10).

With the many challenges and obstacles that hinder growth and development of youth, sports are one of many positive contributions to physical, social, and emotional development. The promotion of physical activity sports participation offers contributes to positive health and establishes a foundation of a lifetime of healthy life choices and activities. Organize sports provide youth with an opportunity to have positive interaction with peers and coaches, which helps youth develop healthy social skills. Sport participation can also have a significant positive impact on emotional development. Having success on the playing fields or experiencing skill development, helps youth have a better overall view of themselves, increasing self-esteem and lowering negative feelings about themselves.

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