

Sports & Child Development



Sports, whether team-based or individual, are a great activity for children that provide a variety of benefits over and beyond physical activity. Participation in sports can help build self-esteem and confidence, can motivate children to excel academically and can help build social skills. Participation also can teach children the benefits of goal-setting and practice. Studies suggest that sport can also have a huge impact on a child's psychological and social well-being. And teach them some extremely valuable life skills too.

Key Benefits

- 1. Physical Activity:** Physical activity is the most obvious benefit of sports participation. Children often spend too much time watching television or playing video games. But sports practices and games provide an opportunity for exercise that can help keep children in shape and be healthy both physically and mentally.
- 2. Social Skills:** Sports participation can help children develop social skills that will benefit them throughout their entire lives. They learn to interact not only with other children of their age, but also with older individuals in their coaches and sports officials. Children learn leadership skills, team-building skills and communication skills that will help them in school, their future career and personal relationships.
- 3. Self-Esteem:** Participation in sports can have a huge positive impact on a child's self-esteem and confidence. Children who participate in sports get praise and encouragement from coaches and parents, which helps to build self-confidence. They also learn to trust their own abilities and push themselves. Constructive criticism is also a major part of sports participation, and children learn to accept such criticism and use it to their benefit. The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry suggests that parents and community be actively involved to ensure that children get the most out of sports participation.
- 4. Academic Success:** It is no surprise that children who participate in sports and athletics excel in academics as well. They can apply the same principles of dedication and hard work learned through sports participation to their studies. Studies in USA have shown that [playing on a high school sports team increases a young woman's chances of graduating from college by 41 percent](#).
- 5. Health:** Sports participation promotes health and wellness not only through childhood but throughout a child's lifetime. Children who participate in sports also get to be more aware of healthy food choices.
- 6. Camaraderie:** Joining a sports team gives children a sense of belonging and the opportunity to make new friends. Some may even become buddies for life! Getting involved in a sport also gives children another social circle outside of school. As per a study in Australia, [roughly one in four students \(27%\) reporting being bullied at school](#). Their joining a sports team has been a much-needed source of social support.
- 7. Learning to Lose:** And learning to do it graciously. Bad sportsmanship is an ugly thing. No one likes a sore loser. Of course, there's no harm in being competitive and expressing frustration in a non-aggressive manner. However, losing with integrity and grace to a better opponent is a lot more honourable than throwing tantrums.
- 8. Discipline and respecting authority:** Following set rules, taking direction and accepting decisions is a large part of playing competitive sport. And players are often penalised for bad behaviour. With regular interaction with coaches, referees and other players, respecting their elders and listening to their peers is an important skill children can take from the court or pitch.
- 9. Controlling emotions:** As children grow up, we expect them to learn to control their emotions. Especially the negative ones. In sport, emotions can run high and learning to channel them the right way can be tough for youngsters. However, once this piece of wisdom is ingrained, children will be better equipped to tackle a whole range of other life challenges.
- 10. Patience:** Unless a child is exceptionally gifted, practice will play a large role in whatever sport or activity he or she is involved in. And if practice makes perfect, then perfect takes patience. It is

certainly a worthwhile lesson for children to learn that if they want to get better at something, it's going to take time.

11. Dedication: Similar to patience, the discipline of training and the commitment it takes to pursue a sport is a trait transferrable to many other aspects of life. It's no coincidence that [participation in sport is linked to higher academic achievement in school](#). If children put time and effort into getting better at something, and see the results, it is likely that they'll learn to put similar amount of dedication into their studies.

12. Working together: A team can't succeed without working together. No matter how good the individual players. Communication is key and learning to be part of a team is synonymous with learning to value the effectiveness of teamwork. This is a useful lesson children playing sports carry into adulthood and their future careers.

13. Less Selfish: Closely tied to teamwork, sports (particularly team sports) are a great platform to teach children to be less selfish. In sport, children need to think about what's best for the team. Not themselves. Egos are not good for team morale or performance. Coaching children to understand that they can achieve more by being less selfish, is one of team sports' great takeaways.

14. Resilience: The highs. The lows. The wins. And the losses. Sport can be a bit of an emotional rollercoaster. [One study](#) found that youngsters who are highly involved in sport are more 'psychologically resilient'. This isn't surprising when sport teaches children to pick themselves up after a hard tackle, or to hold their head high after losing badly, then get right back out there the next week. Sport is about bouncing back, and learning from mistakes. The earlier children can learn these skills, the better.

Overall, the psychological and social benefits of playing sport can help children become well-rounded, mature adults. So, whether it's a team sport or an individual sport what children can learn goes beyond the physical.

Source: [Compilation of information available in public domain](#)