



Why is  
sport  
important  
for  
children? ▶

◀ **C**hildren have to be active every day. Physical activity stimulates growth and leads to improved physical and emotional health. Today, research shows that the importance of physical activity in children is stronger than ever. For example, medical researchers have observed that highly active children are less likely to suffer from high blood pressure, diabetes, cancer of the colon, obesity, and coronary heart disease later in life.

Exercise is also known to relieve stress. Some children experience as much stress, depression, and anxiety as adults do. And because exercise improves health, a fit child is more likely to be well-rested and mentally sharp. Even moderate physical activity has been shown to improve a child's skill at arithmetic, reading, and memorization.

But sport, not just exercise, gives a child more than just physical well-being; it contributes to a child's development both psychologically and socially. Sport psychologist Dr. Glyn Roberts of the University of Illinois has worked primarily in children's sport for the last two decades. He emphasizes that sport is an important learning environment for children.

"Sport can affect a child's development of self-esteem and self-worth," explains Roberts. "It is also within sport that peer status and peer acceptance is established and developed."

One way children gain acceptance by their peers is to be good at activities valued by other children, says Roberts. Research shows that children would rather play sports than do anything else. A study conducted in the United States showed that high school boys and girls would rather be better at sports than in academic subjects. The same study showed that high school boys would rather fail in class than be incompetent on the playing field.

Because sport is important to children, being good at sports is a strong social asset. Young boys in particular use sports and games to measure themselves against their friends. Children who are competent at sports are more easily accepted by children of their own age, and are more likely to be team captains and group leaders. Such children usually have better social skills.

The primary goal of parents and coaches is to help children find the success in sport they need to make them feel valued and wanted. Every child can be successful at one sport or another. Take the time to find the sports that are right for each child.