



**When is it appropriate
to adapt sport for
children? ▶**

Children should not be playing adult sport, says former national level soccer coach Dr. Stuart Robbins. The rules of the game and the strategies are based on the ability of adults to socialize, work together, and compete against others. The equipment and size of the playing area are designed to challenge adult bodies.

Equipment has to be the right size for young players. Bats and racquets that are too heavy make it harder for children to develop basic physical skills, and they end up using the wrong techniques.

Children need to use equipment safely and successfully. Because it is hard for them to hit a ball, bats and racquets should have a proportionately larger striking surface. Balls should not be too fast or too hard.

If sport is adapted to meet the mental and physical needs of young players, they'll have more fun, they'll play more often, and they'll become more skillful.

Chances are, if children play eight-a-side soccer, they'll be running more and kicking the ball more often than if there are 11 players on each team. Playing six-a-side, with small goals and a suitably sized ball makes even more sense, says Dr. Robbins.

Even with the fairest hockey coach in the world, most children spend two-thirds of a game sitting on the bench. But if the ice is divided into three, there can be three six-a-side games played simultaneously with all the kids playing all the time. Similarly, children will develop volleyball and basketball skills much more quickly if they play three-a-side.

“Pure Joy”

Sport psychologist Dr. Terry Orlick, author of *Feeling Great*, says children love to play. It's the centre of their life. He recalls a group of young cyclists emerging from a mountain bike trail, covered in mud from head to toe and laughing happily. They had gone through every puddle they could find. “Just like the toddler who wants to jump in every puddle on the street, these kids had a blast on their bikes. They had great exercise, great challenge, and going through those puddles was part of the pure joy of the experience.”