

How do
children
grow and
develop? ▶



Certain changes occur as children grow and develop. These changes — called stages of development — affect how a child performs in sport. The stages of physical and motor development influence how well a child performs sport skills. The stages of emotional development dictate what kind of competition is most suitable.

Motor development often does not proceed at the same rate as physical development. Rapidly growing children often appear awkward. The child may not be ready to execute or refine a skill until his or her motor ability develops further.

These stages of development are predictable and all children pass through them, says physical education professor Lyle Sanderson. However, the age at which the child enters each stage and the duration of each stage cannot be predicted. A youngster's developmental age can differ significantly from his or her chronological age by as much as two or more years in either direction.

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

When children grow, they experience a change in hormone levels, in their muscles, bones and joints, their energy systems, and their cardiovascular systems (heart and lungs). Up to the onset of puberty, children grow at a steady pace, making regular gains in height and weight.

Coaches and parents must remember that there can be a wide variation in size among youngsters of the same age. In a typical elementary school classroom, height differences among children range from four to five inches.

Just as height can vary from one child to another, so can the timing of a child's growth. Despite the averages, many youngsters experience clear growth spurts, followed by periods during which they grow very little.

EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

As the body grows, children also develop emotionally and intellectually. They gain a stronger understanding of themselves and the relationships they have in the adult world. They improve their ability to interpret, analyze, and think.

A very small child thinks of himself or herself as the centre of the world. Once children reach school age, they pay more attention to other people. As they get older, they are more capable of understanding team play and the relationships involved in team activity. A good coach recognizes the importance of social and mental development within sport by using team games, cooperative skills, and fair play as the basis of activity.