

UNDERSTANDING THE PSYCHOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT OF YOUR CHILD

Perceived Competence:

This concept profoundly affects participation in sport, motivation, anxiety and sport enjoyment. Athletes' perceptions of their athletic competence go through predictable developmental changes:

Children (7-9 years old) focus on outcome and effort in judging one's competence. "I won, therefore I am a good athlete," or "I tried hard, I must be a good athlete." Winning and Losing serve as an important source of competence information for young athletes.

With older children (ages 8-12), there is a gradual decline in the importance of feedback from parents as a source of competence information, an increase in coach technical knowledge as a source of competence information, and a gradual increase in the importance of peer comparison in making competence judgments. "I beat Joe which means I'm a good athlete."

In adolescents (aged 12-13) and older adolescence (aged 16-18 years) is when they recognize that ability and effort impact performance. Prior to this, the athlete can not distinguish between the two concepts. There is a progression from focusing on peer comparison to focusing on self-comparison as a source of competence information. A "task" goal orientation increases with age while "outcome/win" goal orientation decreases with age.

Parents need to understand what sources children rely on to provide competence information. Because outcome is so important at a young age, late maturing athletes are at risk of low competence as they are not experiencing much success. Additionally, coach feedback becomes an increasingly important source of competence information for athletes.

Perspective-taking: the ability to take another's perspective progresses in a predictable sequence and impacts how an individual relates to others.

At a young age (under 8), children are not able to take the perspective of others have an egocentric perspective. The young athlete's thoughts, feelings, ideas and needs are correct (as far as he is concerned) . . . and everyone else thinks and feels this same way too, right?

Gradually through adolescence, children develop the ability to take others' perspective but still view their perspective as the correct view. The latter stage of development occurs when the individual can take and appreciate another's perspective.

Young athletes will often display behavior that is selfish and doesn't take others into account. However, they may not yet have developed the ability to understand others' feelings or points of view. As they develop, a parent can enhance their perspective taking abilities by pointing out how their action affects others. This can help them progress along the developmental spectrum.

Motivation: the direction and intensity of effort.

Younger athletes (7-10) seem more externally motivated while older athletes are often more internally motivated. It appears that young athletes need external motivation, reinforcement and material rewards to maintain their enjoyment of sport. They look to coaches, parents and teammates to provide and structure their fun. Around age 10, children begin seeing rewards as bribes which, under some conditions, can negatively affect motivation.

Older athletes simply enjoy the sport: hard training for them is a primary source of fun. They are internally motivated and need fewer and fewer external motivators. They have more clarity about themselves as athletes and a clearer purpose behind their participation.

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