

# PARENT CHECKLIST

## KIDS AGES 5 AND YOUNGER

Here are 10 questions to ask yourself so he or she can have a positive sports experience. Check each box, collect your score at the bottom, and discover videos and resources to build an athlete for life.

- ☐ **HAVE I TALKED WITH MY CHILDREN'S PEDIATRICIAN ABOUT SPORTS?**  
The American Academy of Pediatrics offers evidence-based guidance on a range of topics related to sports safety and physical activity for children. Ask what type of activities are advisable to introduce at each stage of development.
- ☐ **WITH INFANTS, AM I ENCOURAGING SKILL DEVELOPMENT IN MOVEMENT?**  
Humans are wired to move. Reaching and grasping, pulling and pushing, moving the head, torso and limbs – all of it helps develop the relationship between the brain and body. Interact with your child and offer effusive praise.
- ☐ **WITH TODDLERS, AM I PROVIDING AN APPROPRIATE MIX OF PLAY ENVIRONMENTS?**  
The guidelines for this age group are at least 30 minutes of structured physical activity each day, plus anywhere from 60 minutes to several hours of unstructured play. Toddlers should not be sedentary for more than 60 minutes at a time, except when sleeping.
- ☐ **HAVE I ENROLLED MY CHILD IN A LEARN-TO-SWIM CLASS?**  
Kids love to get wet. And for a child who is proficient in the water, a world of lifetime sport options open up: snorkeling, rowing, kayaking, surfing, standup paddleboard, water skiing, sailing, triathlon, swim team, among others.
- ☐ **HAVE I IDENTIFIED SAFE PLACES TO PLAY IN MY COMMUNITY?**  
People living within a mile of a park are four times more likely to use it than others. When choosing a home, take an inventory of nearby assets that promote active play: sidewalks, bike paths, playgrounds, and school facilities.
- ☐ **IS MY PRESCHOOLER IN PROGRAMS THAT PRIORITIZE PHYSICAL LITERACY?**  
Physical literacy is the ability, confidence and desire to be active for life. One key is the development of fundamental movement skills – agility, balance, coordination. Certainly before age 5, it's not sport-specific skills.
- ☐ **DOES MY CHILD'S PRESCHOOL ENCOURAGE LEARNING THROUGH PLAY?**  
Through kindergarten in Finland, teachers hold off on academic drilling and mostly ask kids to play in settings where they can solve problems. Finland's students end up with some of the highest math scores in the world.
- ☐ **HAVE I POPULATED OUR HOME WITH TOYS THAT ENCOURAGE MOVEMENT?**  
Provide a child with the tools to play, on their own terms (not those of adults), and often they will. Free play builds physical literacy and love of game, with intrinsic rewards that encourage further engagement.
- ☐ **DO I UNDERSTAND AMERICAN DEVELOPMENT MODEL PRINCIPLES?**  
ADM is a framework designed by the US Olympic Committee that describes the five stages for proper athletic development. From ages 0 to 12, it's "Discover, Learn & Play." ADM debunks myths. From the start, get smart.
- ☐ **HAVE I IDENTIFIED WHAT BENEFITS I HOPE MY CHILD DERIVES FROM SPORTS?**  
Start with the end in mind, then design backwards. If it's a sports experience that develops social-emotional skills and healthy habits for life, resist the manic chase for the athletic scholarship and pro salaries. Elite performance cannot be manufactured.

Learn more at [aspenprojectplay.org/parent-resources](https://aspenprojectplay.org/parent-resources).



# PARENT CHECKLIST

## KIDS AGES 6-12 PLAYING SPORTS

Here are 10 questions to ask yourself, your child and your sports program so he or she can have a positive sports experience. Check each box, collect your score at the bottom, and discover videos and resources to build an athlete for life.

- ☐ **HAVE I ASKED MY CHILD WHY THEY WANT TO PLAY SPORTS?**  
Is it to have fun with classmates? Be tested at the highest level competitively? What do they want to get from the activity? Finding the right program starts with understanding a child's social-emotional needs.
- ☐ **HAVE I ASKED MY CHILD WHICH SPORTS INTEREST THEM?**  
Most kids get funneled into the same small handful of sports. But there are 120 of them offered across the U.S., with programs that might just be a few miles away. There's a sport for every kid. Explore the options with them.
- ☐ **DO I ENCOURAGE UNSTRUCTURED AND LOOSELY STRUCTURED PLAY?**  
Michael Jordan had a "love of the game" clause in his NBA contract that allowed him to play pickup hoops. Build the same ethos into your kid's experience so it's not all organized competition. Give kids equipment, and get out of the way.
- ☐ **DOES MY CHILD'S PROGRAM PROMOTE MULTISPORT PARTICIPATION?**  
As early as grade school, your child may get pressure to focus on playing one sport year-round. Research on child and athletic development rejects this approach. Ask program leaders how they'll make room for playing other sports.
- ☐ **ARE THE COACHES TRAINED IN KEY COMPETENCIES TO WORK WITH KIDS?**  
The best programs mandate training in coaching philosophy/methods, sport skills & tactics, and safety protections including first aid and CPR (and, in collision sports like football and hockey, concussion management).
- ☐ **DOES THE PROGRAM EMBRACE SMALL-SIDED, AGE-APPROPRIATE PLAY?**  
Kids are not miniature adults. Six isn't even 16. Children learn better and have more fun when play spaces, equipment and the number of participants on the field/court/ice are modified to their level. Small rosters help, too.
- ☐ **DOES THE PROGRAM OFFER AN APPROPRIATE PRACTICE-TO-GAME RATIO?**  
Kids want access to the action. You want them to be physically active, while also minimizing the costs and time allocated to away-game transportation. The best programs understand that development mostly occurs in training. At least two practices for every game is best.
- ☐ **DOES THE PROGRAM ENCOURAGE EQUAL PLAYING TIME?**  
There's a time for programs to sort the weak from the strong in sports. It's not before kids grow into their bodies, minds and interests. Through age 12, at least, programs should invest in every kid equally. That includes playing time.
- ☐ **DOES THE PROGRAM SYSTEMATICALLY SEEK FEEDBACK FROM KIDS AND PARENTS?**  
A simple online survey is easy enough to create and send at the end of the season, collecting insights that can be shared with program leadership to improve quality and foster retention. Honor the programs that honor input.
- ☐ **DOES THE PROGRAM MAKE EFFORTS TO FOSTER PHYSICAL LITERACY?**  
Physical literacy is the ability, confidence and desire to be active for life, with an emphasis on fundamental movement skills – not just sport-specific skills. Learning to move well can open access to dozens of sports.

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# PARENT CHECKLIST

## KIDS AGES 6-12 NOT PLAYING SPORTS

Here are 10 questions to ask yourself, your child and your sports program so he or she can have a positive sports experience. Check each box, collect your score at the bottom, and discover videos and resources to build an athlete for life.

- ☐ **IS MY CHILD GETTING AN HOUR OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY DAILY?**  
If the answer is no, they are not getting CDC's recommended amount for youth. That means moderate-to-vigorous activity, with at least three of those days also involving exercise that strengthens muscles and bones.
- ☐ **DO I REGULARLY ENGAGE IN PHYSICAL ACTIVITY OR SPORTS MYSELF?**  
Research shows that parents who are physically active are more likely to have physically active children. Be a role model, while also encouraging fun activities that you can enjoy together – from bike riding to a backyard catch.
- ☐ **HAVE I POPULATED OUR HOME WITH BALLS AND OTHER SPORTS EQUIPMENT?**  
Provide a child with the tools to play, on their own terms (not those of adults), and often they will. Unstructured play builds physical literacy and love of game, with intrinsic rewards that encourage further engagement.
- ☐ **DO I LIMIT SCREEN TIME AT HOME AND REQUIRE MY CHILD TO GO OUTSIDE?**  
The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends parents place consistent limits on time spent with media. Start by removing TVs from bedrooms. Research shows more than 1.5 hours of daily TV is a risk factor for obesity.
- ☐ **HAVE I ASKED MY CHILD WHICH SPORTS THEY MIGHT LIKE TO LEARN?**  
Most kids get funneled into the same, small handful of team sports. But there are 120 sports offered across the U.S., and some providers and sites might just be a few miles away. There's a sport for every kid. Internet tools can help you explore.
- ☐ **HAVE I CONSIDERED ACTIVITIES THAT LIMIT PEER COMPARISON?**  
Rock-climbing. Skiing. Snowshoeing. Martial arts. Archery. Individual sports can feel safe, especially for kids with special needs. Then there are more recreational team games, like Ultimate Frisbee.
- ☐ **IS THE PROGRAM I'M CONSIDERING FOCUSED ON SELF-IMPROVEMENT?**  
Kids lacking physical confidence especially benefit from programs that foster a "mastery climate" in which development, not outcomes, is the goal. Ask programs for their mission statement – and how they define success.
- ☐ **HAVE I THOUGHT ABOUT VOLUNTEERING FOR A RECREATION BOARD?**  
Want more inclusive, development-focused policies in youth sports that make room for kids like yours? Do something about it and run for a town recreation board or youth sport program board. Get in there and change things.
- ☐ **HAVE I ADVOCATED FOR QUALITY PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND RECESS?**  
These settings can engage all kids. But they're under-resourced. The median P.E. budget for schools is \$764 per year. Encourage your school board to make P.E. and recess available on a daily basis, led by trained instructors.
- ☐ **HAVE I LOOKED FOR LOW-COST, "LEARN TO PLAY" OPPORTUNITIES?**  
Organized leagues today can be costly, and a full-season commitment can cause a kid who doesn't like the sport to turn off to sports in general. Find programs and camps that offer sport sampling, ideally at low or no cost.

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