**Sport Participation**

**Five Main Reasons Kids Walk Away From Sports**

1. It’s no longer fun
2. They have lost ownership of the experience
3. They don’t get playing time
4. They are afraid to make mistakes
5. They feel disrespected

**Ten Critical Items in Achieving a Quality Youth Sports Program**

1. Physical and psychological safety
2. Appropriate Structure. The program has clear rules, expectations and responsibilities of youth, parents, coaches, officials and sport organizers
3. Supportive relationships, adults and youth are able to establish trusted connections
4. Opportunities to belong. The program fosters friendships and provides youth with a sense of a positive experience
5. Positive social norms
6. Support for efficacy and mattering. The program provides youth the opportunity to be useful and to make a difference in their social worlds.
7. Opportunities for skill building
8. Active learning
9. Opportunities for recognition. Players are acknowledged for their contributions
10. Integration of family, school and community efforts

**Ensure young players can experience success in learning the skills of the sport.**

1. Provide an environment that nurtures the youth’s physical and emotional well-being
2. Provide an atmosphere in which young athletes can raise their self-worth
3. Maintain healthy attitudes that don’t emphasize winning at all costs, but that emphasize personal improvement
4. Let the youth have fun
5. Spectators should “applaud and cheer for everyone, not just your child or his or her team.” Spectators should “keep cool” and avoid “spectator rage?

**“Burnout”**

What is Burnout? It’s a negative psychological and physical state in which young athletes feel tired, less able to perform well, and less interested in playing their sport. Three symptoms characterize burnout:

1. Physical and Emotional Exhaustion
2. Reduced sport accomplishment
3. Devaluation of sport

**Physical and Emotional Exhaustion:**

The exhaustion associated with burnout involves the depletion of emotional and physical resources beyond the typical tiredness, that comes and goes throughout a sport season.

**Reduced Sport Accomplishment:**

A lack of performance success or inconsistent performance, or it can be more about the perception on the part of the athlete that he/she is not playing up to their potential. The athlete may feel that they are not getting anywhere – for example, not moving forward.

**Devaluation of Sport:**

A reduction in value: the athlete doesn’t care as much about his sport. Athletes may say “I’m sick of doing this.” “I don’t care about playing anymore” or “it’s just not fun anymore. “Another common symptom is questioning things- for example “Why am I doing this?

* Athletes (majority) surveyed admitted to having experienced low to moderate levels of burnout. Athletes report more burnout as they increase in age 7-17 years.

Three Groups of Burnout in Athletes:

1. Overload Factors
2. Social Climate Factors
3. Personality Factors

Overload Factors –

* Overstress involves demand that exceeds athlete’s abilities to cope (overload without adequate physical and mental recovery.
* Decreased performance and psychological distress from overtraining, excessive training and inadequate recovery.
* What’s appropriate for athlete’s? Too much overload without adequate recovery results in decreased performance (called staleness) exhaustion, decreased interest in training, and negative moods (burnout).
* Staleness is the term typically used to describe impaired performance as a result of overtraining; burnout is a broader concept that focuses on psychological distress and decreased motivation in a previously enjoyed activity as a result of overload without adequate recovery.

Social Climate Factors –

* Those negative aspects of the youth sport culture that are harmful to the psychological development of well-being of kids.
* These include pressure from parents to perform or achieve certain outcomes, i.e. Winning, making the varsity team, gaining a college scholarship and negative coaching behaviors, such as extreme controlling behaviors and developmentally inappropriate training and performance expectations.
* Athletes who feel trapped in their sport participation tend to be higher in burnout than athletes who were personally invested in and enthusiastic about their sport.
* This occurs when athletes do not really want to participate but feel they have to maintain their involvement in sport based on social pressure from others.
* It has been argued that burnout is not a response to stress but rather a response to the social climate of highly organized youth sport, in which young athletes are highly controlled and inhibited in their identity development.
* **Stress is a symptom of burnout, but not the cause.**
* The explanation of burnout is important because it identifies the root of burnout or the youth sport culture, as opposed to some personal failure or lack of competence (toughness) in young athletes.

Personality Factors –

* Several personality factors have been related to burnout in young athletes. Trait anxiety and weak coping skills are obvious factors, based on their importance in the stress process.
* Negative perfectionism and obsessive passion are examples of personality factors that create extreme aspirations and irrational needs (inability to accept mistakes, inflexible goals, compelling pressure to participate) in relation to one’s sport participation. Interestingly, positive or adaptive perfectionism (high standards, organizational skill, achievement orientation) and harmonious passion (loving one’s sport without feeling controlled by it) is related to lower levels of burnout.
* Unidimensional identity, also related to burnout.
* Engaging in different types of activities to define themselves in multidimensional ways.

**Strategies to Help Athletes Avoid and Deal with Burnout**

* It is thought that physical and emotional exhaustion serves as a first indicator of developing burnout in young athletes. Find the best strategy to ensure some rest, recovery, and mental rejuvenation.
* Identify athletes whose personalities or life situations predispose them to burnout, and make it a point to intervene with guidance and suggestions to help them achieve without crossing the line into harmful training behaviors. Gaining perspective and developing skills to move from negative types of passion and perfectionism toward more adaptive forms of these characteristics would be useful.
* Help young athletes learn active coping skills. Better lifestyle management, healthier decisions, more rational perspectives on competition, and skill in identifying and pursuing personal mastery goals are all coping skills that can be learned by young athletes.
* Guide young people in adopting multiple areas of interest and achievement. Such variety and multidimensionality guard against burnout that occurs from a single-minded obsession gone awry.
* Listen to your kids, and clarify whether they want to continue in a sport.
* Parents know best the vast array of stressors operating in a young athletes life.
* Someone has to be in charge and protect the health and wellbeing of the athletes, particularly since they’re young.
* Lead the charge for developmentally appropriate practice in youth sport. The excessive control and exploitation of youth athletes to pursue adult-mandated goals such as early specialization, as well as an emphasis on winning over athletes development, lead to burnout and dropping out. Follow the guidelines in the long-term athlete development model.
* The emphasis is on a progressive development of skills, a gradual introduction to competition, a focus on enjoyment and the nurturing of motivation, and a lifelong commitment to physical activity.

**Age Categories**

Chronological Age vs. Developmental Age

1. Chronological Age
2. Skeletal Age
3. Relative Age (Age variation within group)
4. Developmental Age
5. General Training Age (# of years spent training)
6. Sport-Specific Age (# of years spent specializing in particular sport)

* **Possible causes of Youth dropouts in sport include:**

\* Overemphasis on winning as the objective with resulting increases in pressure to win and achieve

\* Stress on high performance that translates into longer hours of practice, longer seasons, and specialization in one sport at an early age

\* Expenses of participation, travelling teams, sport camps, sport academies, coaching, and equipment that are out of reach for the middle class families.

\* Increased injury incidence due to inordinate demands on young bodies.

\* Increased participation in alternative sports by young people who are turned off by traditional adult-organized programs.

\* Lack of training for youth coaches and the resulting frustration of kids who take orders from well-intentioned but misguided coaches.

\* Earlier starts in youth sport (sometimes as young as 3or 4 years of age); children simply grow bored with a sport after a number of years.

**\*\* Perhaps the most alarming statistic is that by some estimates, over 70% of participants drop out of youth sport programs along the way to high school.**

**Gender- (Boys vs. Girls)**

1. Boys more likely to be involved in sports at earlier age
2. Boys more likely to play multiple sports
3. Girls tend to enter sport later than boys (7.4vs. 6.8)
4. Girls also dropped out sooner and in greater numbers
5. Interestingly, girls were more likely than boys to take part in a wide array of sports including cheerleading, dance, competitive rope jumping and volleyball while boys tended to stick with more traditional sports
6. Girls increase 6,134 in 2009-10 to 13,496 in 2015-16 (wrestling)??

**Other:**

* Suburban community participation rates between boys and girls are comparable, but in rural and urban communities, girls fall far behind.
* 84% of urban and 68% of rural girls have no physical education classes at all in grades 11-12. Compared with only 48% of girls in suburban schools who do not participate in physical education.
* Youth sports are racially and ethnically diverse and in fact at many ages, boys of color tend to have higher participation rates in sport than caucasians. The picture for girls of color is not encouraging. They seem to be hit by both gender and skin color discrimination, and their participation levels fall significantly below those of caucasian girls.
* Concerns about concussions may be hurting numbers for high school football and the decline of college wrestling may be hurting participation in high school wrestling.
* NFHS -2014-15: The overall number of sports participants has been up, but the number of boys participants has been down, mainly because of a decline in numbers for wrestling and football.
* More options to choose from, i.e. ice hockey and other sports that have become more popular.
* NFHS figures showed more athletes than ever are participating in high school sports with an increase of 11,389. Girls increased by 20,071 participating, and there were 8,682 fewer boys participating.
* Boys sports – soccer grew the most while wrestling (which has seen a precipitous drop in college scholarship had 11,306 fewer participants).
  + Is this a reason not to participate in wrestling? Parent driven decision? Over the past 40 years there has been a significant decline in D-1 wrestling programs.

**Trends**

The middle school years are when we see the majority of dropouts.

Primary reasons for dropping out: Structure emphasis on competitive results, length of season, and commitment along with boredom, are typically cited as primary reasons.

Kids are pressured to pick one sport as early as seven and eight years old. They play on club teams that travel across the country before the players go through puberty. They play year round and often for more than one team at a time. And parents and coaches push kids to succeed at a young age in hopes that one day the child will receive a college scholarship.

USA Hockey changes – Banned body-checking and encouraged kids to play other sports (under 12).

Why kids quit sports:

1. It’s no longer fun
2. They have lost ownership of the experience
3. They don’t get playing time
4. They are afraid to make mistakes
5. They feel disrespected

* Youth can make sports more positive by showing good sportsmanship and focusing on mastering skills.
* Parents can help make sports a positive experience by supporting the youth and the coach. This includes being an appropriate spectator, letting the coach be the coach, and encouraging kids to have fun.
* Coaches can help by promoting positive coach/parent and coach/child relationships. Coaches need to be able to communicate effectively, understand conflict resolution and remember when it comes to sports, kids number one priority is having fun.