



Should We “Train” Kids Under 13 Years Old?

...ABSOLUTELY!

The **LTAD approach** is *"the life-long athletic performance development model,"* which has been adopted by many countries and organizations, including the Titleist Performance Institute and USA Hockey, and *"focuses on having kids perform age-appropriate skill acquisition drills to maximize athletic potential. It gets progressively more specialized as the athlete develops and reaches the next level of development."*

Tudor Bompa stated *"From early childhood to maturation, people go through several stages of development, which include pre-puberty, puberty, post-puberty and maturation. For each development stage, there is a corresponding phase of athletic training."*

So what exactly are these **"age-appropriate acquisition drills"**? To answer that we need to look at what Titleist calls **"Physical Literacy."** Physical Literacy is the *"development of fundamental movement skills (FMS) and fundamental sport skills (FSS) which allow a child to move confidently and efficiently in a wide range of physical activities. A child should be physically literate by the onset of the growth spurt."* For girls, peak height velocity averages 12 years old and for boys, it's 14.

First, let's look at fundamental movement skills. They are general patterns of movement that combine two or more body segments and according to Dr. Vern Seefeldt, director of the Youth Sports Institute at Michigan State, they are the *"basic vocabulary of sport."* FMS are broken up into four categories:

- **Locomotive Skills-** running, jumping, dodging, skipping, hopping, bounding
- **Stability Skills-** agility, balance, coordination, speed, change of direction
- **Manipulative/Object Control Skills-** throwing, kicking, striking, catching, dribbling
- **Awareness-** spatial, kinesthetic, and body awareness; rules



After a solid base of FMS, kids can transition into fundamental sport skills, which are basically skills that are more specific to the tasks of that sport, with much more complex movements. **Skipping over the fundamental movement skills and jumping too quickly into fundamental sport skills (Early Specialization) can rob a kid of the proper development.** *"A child who develops a better base of FMS will develop sport skills at a faster rate and peak at a higher level of expertise."* It's building the foundation before the rest of the house.

Make them athletic first, teach them the sport skills second!

There is also the issue of the **"10 Year/10,000 hour rule,"** popularized by Malcolm Gladwell in his book **Outliers**, although studies on the "10 Year Rule" have dated back to the early 80s. The rule states that it takes a minimum of 10 years and 10,000 hours of training for an athlete to reach elite levels.

The 10,000 hours has been debated, and much of the debate about how many hours is required (some show 4,000, some show 6,000), is *"due to the lack of agreement between experts on what they consider practice."*

So let's assume that you still think that kids don't need this type of program and will develop FMS on their own

in the playground and at school. I think the most compelling reason to be training them at this age comes from the theory of "**Windows of Trainability.**" Many experts (including Bouchard, Malina and Bar-Or in Growth, Maturation and Physical Activity; Balyi and Way; Dr. Ernst Zwick and Dr. Liam Hennessey) believe *"that there are sensitive periods or critical times in every child's life where certain skills can be learned at an accelerated rate."* *"There will be certain times in a child's development, that the body is more responsive to certain skills due to changing growth velocity."* Balyi and Way described the "**Five S's**" that have windows of optimal training:

- **Stamina (Endurance)**
- **Strength**
- **Speed**
- **Skill**
- **Suppleness (Mobility)**

Let's look at the research for the **Windows of Trainability** with respect to **Speed and Suppleness.**

According to the research, there are two windows of opportunity to develop speed, with boys and girls being different. The first window for boys, is between the ages of 7-9, for girls 6-8. The focus at this stage is agility, quickness, change of direction, linear, lateral and multi-directional speed. The duration of the intervals/activities should be 5 seconds and under. All of these qualities are being "trained" during the Cyclone, and the kids never even know it. They're just having fun, getting more athletic and developing speed and agility properly. The second window for boys is between 13-16 and girls 11-13. The question becomes: "Can they be as fast as possible while training in the second window if they missed the opportunity in the first window?"

For suppleness, the research shows the optimum times for both boys and girls are between the ages of 6 and 10, then again during peak height velocity (for girls 12 years old and for boys, it's 14).

Could we be missing out on an opportunity to help kids become better athletes, regardless of what sport they are playing? It's possible.

Will it be a lot of work? Yes it will, but it sure seems worth it.

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