

Sticking to sports can help kids adjust

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Thinking of getting your child to take up a sport that involves a coach or instructor? Good news: a new study finds that children who engage in

organized physical activity at a young age are less likely to have emotional difficulties by the time they turn 12.

"The elementary school years are a critical time in [child development](#)," said Frédéric N. Brière, an Université de Montréal professor of psycho-education who led the study, published this month in *Pediatric Research*.

"And every parent wants to raise a well-adjusted child."

Besides keeping children from being sedentary, [physical activities](#) such as structured sports have the potential to be enriching both physically and mentally, Brière believes, something parents seem to know instinctively.

The study tested that intuitive logic with a large representative population of typically developing Canadian children.

"We followed a birth cohort over time to examine whether consistent participation in organized sport from ages 6 to 10 would minimize risks associated with [emotional distress](#), anxiety, shyness, social withdrawal at age 12," said Brière. "Our goal was to test this question as critically as possible by eliminating pre-existing child or family conditions that could offer an alternative explanation."

To do this, Brière and his team at UdeM's School of Psycho-Education examined data from a cohort of children born in 1997 or 1998 who are part of the Quebec Longitudinal Study of Child Development coordinated by the Institut de la Statistique du Québec. From ages 6 to 10, mothers reported whether their child participated in organized physical activity. At age 12, teachers reported on the [child](#)'s levels of emotional distress, anxiety, shyness, and social withdrawal at school.

"The results revealed that children who participated consistently from

ages 6 to 10 showed fewer instances of those factors at age 12 than their counterparts who did not engage in physical activity in a consistent way," said Brière. "We found these benefits above and beyond pre-existing individual and family characteristics."

His conclusion: "Getting kids actively involved in organized sport seems to promote global development. This involvement appears to be good on a socio-emotional level and not just because of physical benefits. Being less emotionally distressed at the juncture between elementary and high school is a priceless benefit for children, as they are about to enter a much larger universe with bigger academic challenges. This research supports current parental guidelines promoting children's involvement in physical activity."

"Consistent participation in organized physical activity predicts emotional adjustment in [children](#)," by Frédéric N. Brière, Arianne Imbeault, Gary Goldfield and Linda S. Pagani was published in the May issue of *Pediatric Research*.

More information: Frédéric N. Brière et al. Consistent participation in organized physical activity predicts emotional adjustment in children, *Pediatric Research* (2019). [DOI: 10.1038/s41390-019-0417-5](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41390-019-0417-5)

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