

# Ask the Pediatrician: How to keep the fun in sports to keep kids active

February 12 2024, by Joel S. Brenner, MD, MPH, FAAP and Drew Watson, MD, MS, FAAP, American Academy of Pediatrics

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Does your child dream of becoming the next Olympic star or pro athlete? While you might share those goals, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) encourages all parents and families to take a commonsense approach when it comes to sports training.

These days, it's less common to see kids outside playing pick-up games or racing each other to see who's the fastest. Open, [free play](#) seems to be less popular as young kids choose a single sport or activity and play it all year round.

Organized sports can be great for kids. They can help them develop physical skills and get regular exercise that supports healthy growth and well-being. Participating in sports can also help them make friends, learn how to be part of a team and play fair, improve [self-esteem](#) and have fun. But studies show that nearly 70% of kids across the U.S. drop their favorite sport before age 13.

This is a [warning sign](#) that far too many young people are experiencing burnout, which can cause them to turn away from the activities they once loved. Burnout also interferes with a budding habit of physical activity and the lifelong physical and mental health benefits it provides.

Burnout happens when kids no longer feel a sense of fun and accomplishment when playing or practicing.

This can happen for many reasons, but single-minded, non-stop focus on just one activity when children are young—whether it's baseball, swimming, football, dance, gymnastics, hockey, lacrosse or any other choice—may cause kids to lose interest and enthusiasm. It can also happen when [young athletes](#) are externally motivated, working toward [goals](#) or dreams that others set for them, rather than their own goals that they develop themselves.

Overtraining and [burnout](#) can leave a young athlete feeling physically or mentally exhausted. They may believe that winning in the sport is the only thing that coaches, parents and families want and need them to do. In the worst situations, kids may assume this sport is their only chance for success in life.

We encourage families to take a [positive attitude](#) toward sports that focuses on fun, teamwork and regular exercise. This way, sports can become part of a balanced lifestyle that keeps kids active and healthy into adulthood.

For more information, go to [HealthyChildren.org](https://www.healthychildren.org).

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