



AIS **pathways** **CONNECT**

Top 10 tips for parents to nurture and support your child's foundational sporting development



Welcome

All parents want to make the right decisions for and with their child. In this document we have collated our top 10 tips for parents to nurture and support their child's sporting development.

Parents are major drivers and supporters in an athlete's development, and this document provides evidence-based advice on how to best facilitate a child's sporting development.

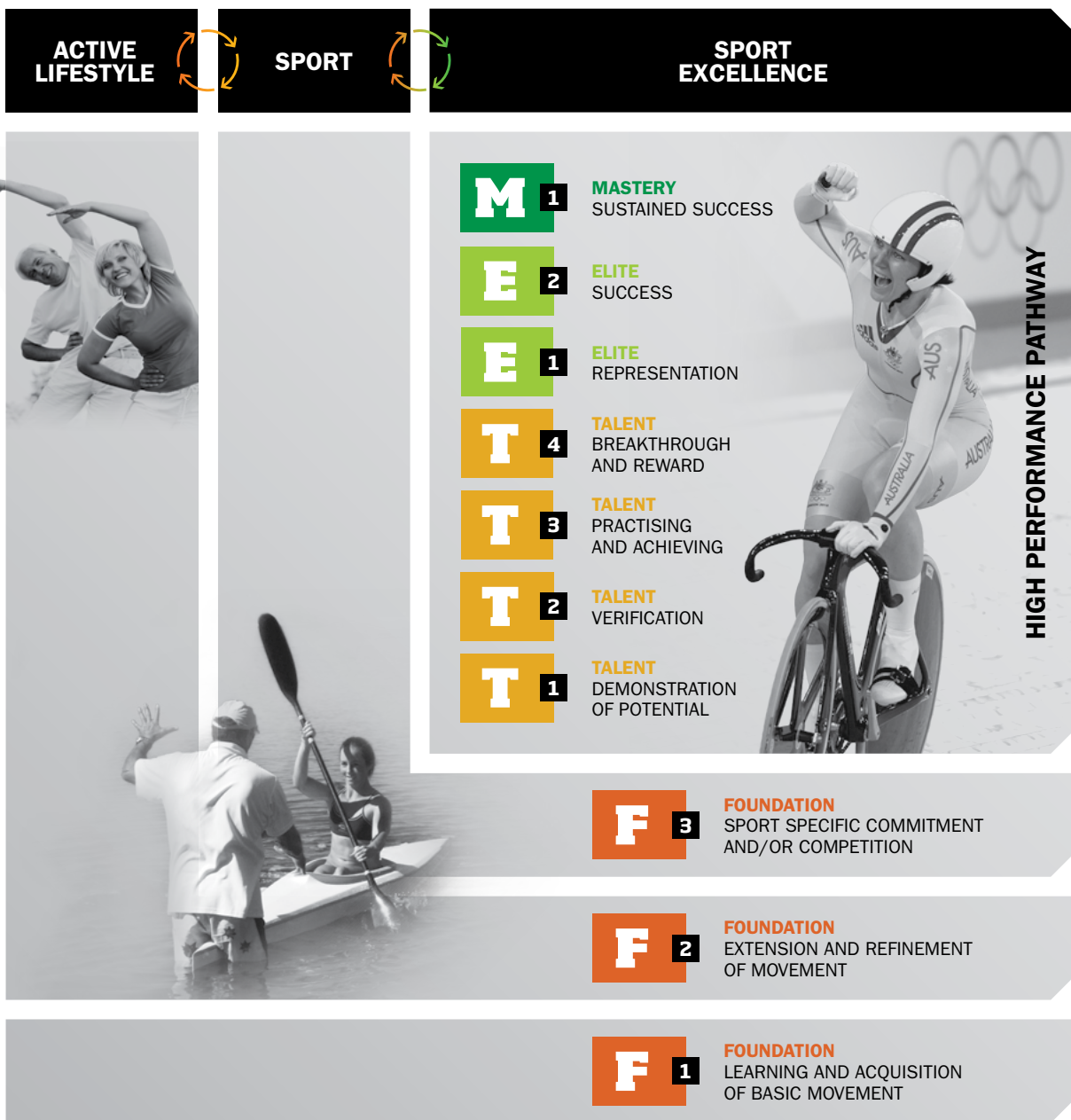
When considering these recommendations, it is important to match your expectations with your child's developmental status and their motivation for participating in sport. Children often play sport for fun and social reasons, competitive and performance-orientated reasons or a combination of all these factors. Nurturing a love of playing sport at any level has many benefits. Remember this is just the start of their lifelong journey enjoying sport.

Well-intentioned individuals often exhibit the traits of a 'bad sports parent' because they simply lack better guidance. Parents are recognised as critical support agents for their children's sporting future. Your guidance, support and behaviour during your child's formative sporting years can positively influence their sporting journey, enhance the parent's own enjoyment of sport and foster an enriched bond between you and your child.

For a positive, fun and nurturing experience of sport, parents must remain positive, regardless of the result, and stay realistic in their shared expectations to avoid putting pressure on the child. You can greatly assist your child's development through your engagement with your child's coach, by providing a strong and positive role model and upholding integrity and respect.

The following tips are in accordance with:

- » [Play.Sport.Australia](#) – the new game plan for sports participation developed and endorsed by the Australian Sports Commission (ASC). Best practice specific to the foundational levels of the [Foundation, Talent, Elite and Mastery \(FTEM\)](#) athlete development framework which is informed by contemporary research and practice.



FTEM, pictured above, is a user-friendly framework of sport development, representative of the ‘whole of sport’ pathway which includes active lifestyle activities, recreational and high performance sport. Common to all three outcomes is a strong foundational base of development and lifelong participation in sport (F1, F2 and F3). The following tips or recommendations are specific to these levels.

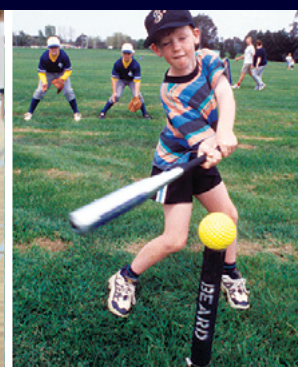
Our Top Ten Tips

F

1

FOUNDATION

LEARNING AND ACQUISITION OF BASIC MOVEMENT



The focus of the first foundational level of the FTEM development framework is on learning or re-learning (for children/adults with an acquired disability) a repertoire of basic or fundamental movement skills.

TIP 1: Foster your child's fundamental movement competencies

Check that your child's activities address most of these fundamental movement skills: locomotive, object control, body control and aquatic. Below are some activities to help develop these skills:

Unorganised activities at or close to home:

- » stopping and kicking a ball
- » hitting a stationary and later a moving ball with a small light cricket bat
- » running (in a straight line, zigzag, backward)
- » jumping (one and two leg)
- » skipping (with and without a rope)
- » climbing and tumbling, at home or at a local park or trampoline park
- » experimenting with different swim strokes
- » paddling and standing on a surfboard at the beach.

Organised early movement programs, such as:

- » [Gymnastic Australia's LaunchPad](#) programmes
- » [BMX Australia's BMX Mini Wheelers](#) programme
- » swimming lessons like those run by an [AUSTSWIM](#) recognised programme

Other resources:

- » [NSW Department of Education and Communities](#) – Get Skilled: Get Active
- » [WA Department of Education, Fundamental Movement Skills – Manual for Teachers](#)
- » [ACT Government health directorate – Active play every day.](#)

F **2**

FOUNDATION
EXTENSION AND REFINEMENT
OF MOVEMENT



This second FTEM level focusses on exposing a child to greater movement challenges to improve their foundational or fundamental movement skills. Similar to the F1 phase, this is achieved through a mix of unorganised sporting activity (deliberate play) at home, at a local park or at school and organised age-appropriate and modified sport (such as Sporting Schools, AFL Auskick, Hookin2Hockey, Viva7s rugby, MILO in2CRICKET).

We consider these areas to be important in F2 development:

Family support



Deliberate play

Age-modified sport formats and equipment

TIP 2: Promote deliberate play with your children by setting up diversified and stimulating play environments at home

- » Explore your home environment inside and outside and use what you've got at your disposal including brick walls, fences, grassy, sandy and cement areas, the corridor or veranda in your house (great for balloon tennis, soccer and cricket with a soft ball).
- » Provide your children with an array of age and size-appropriate, bats, sticks, racquets and balls of varying sizes, and basketball targets that they can challenge themselves with on their own. Below is a citation from a study that investigated the role of deliberate play in the development of cricket batting skills (Weissensteiner, Abernethy & Farrow, 2009).

You'd be playing with a hard ball in the backyard and around the park but on the road when you're playing with tennis balls or other sorts of composite balls or down at the beach we'd often shave one side so it'd swing. If we were down the beach we'd dunk it in the water so that made it a bit heavier and ... that'd make it fly a bit differently.

- » Encourage ambidexterity (e.g. hitting and throwing with left and right arms and kicking with left and right feet) and finding unique solutions to movement challenges. Children and athletes come in all shapes and sizes, so the key is finding whatever movement provides the desired result.
- » Promote and embrace creativity when it comes to setting your own rules – rules like hitting the ball over the fence is six and out.

We had a slat fence with upright posts and beam supports ... if I hit it between the beams it was runs but if I hit under the beams or over the top beam it was out, or if I hit the uprights it was out, so they were my fielders. The challenge was to see how much of a risk I could take, the most runs were scored in the hardest areas. (Weissensteiner et al 2009)

Other resources:

- » The [Healthy Active Kids website](#) has some great examples of deliberate play, including suggestions for [outdoors](#), [indoors](#) and [pool play](#).
- » The [ASC website](#), has resources for [traditional indigenous games](#) and [Olympic sports activity cards](#).

TIP 3: Foster everyday sport activity and playtime at home and be an effective support provider

You can:

- » limit screen time at home
- » assist early skill development by joining in or foster deliberate play by exploring and making the most of your child's home developmental environment inside and out (see last tip for ideas)
- » be a sounding board, provide emotional support and positive encouragement
- » provide financial and travel support
- » offer technical advice, especially if you've played the same sport, or help your child find information
- » facilitate your child's access to appropriate instruction and coaching.
- » If you are interested in becoming a coach check out the [ASC website](#), or the [Sporting Schools website](#).

TIP 4: Insist on the right sport format and equipment

The Australian Government's Sporting Schools initiative provides [a great choice of appropriate sport](#) formats for primary school children before, during and after school.

These programmes, informed by contemporary research and practice and delivered by experienced instructors provide a great introduction to sport and lots of fun.

While it might be tempting to buy your child the latest branded adult-sized equipment used by their sporting hero, you may be limiting their skill development and risking injury.

You can:

- » Check if your school has registered for Sporting Schools and enrol your children in programmes they would enjoy. If a particular sport is not available through Sporting Schools, check out the sport's website for more information.
- » Talk to your sporting goods provider or online about appropriate equipment for your child.
- » Allow your child to try sporting equipment in the store before you buy.
- » Specific to sports such as cricket, tennis and hockey use Gunn and Moore First cricket ball, Wilson Starter Tennis balls or Whiffle balls respectively to slow down the speed of the ball, or large tennis balls (Scorcher balls) making it easier for interception.



In the final foundational level, sport-specific skills are being refined and progressed and the young athlete is committed to regular training and formal or informal competition. This level commonly is the beginning of most club-based sporting experiences.

We consider these factors to be important for ideal F3 development:



TIP 5: Sample, sample, sample and have fun!

Except for early specialising-sports such as gymnastics, resist the temptation for your child to specialise in one sport too early.

Trying a large range of sports during childhood and continuing to play several sports, at least until the age of 15, is likely to:

- » maximise the development of a full range of sporting skills
- » promote adaptability of skills and all-body coordination and control
- » enhance the possibility of later senior sporting success
- » minimise the likelihood of overuse injuries.

You can:

- » encourage your child to try out a few sports, organised and unorganised
- » allow them to work out which sports they are good at and which ones they like the most
- » allow them to decide which sport they want to specialise in.

TIP 6: Practice, practice, practice but make it fun and relevant

- » Encourage your children, with the support of their coach, to practice their sporting skills in an ecological manner, for example, practice the full complement of skills within a context similar to that in competition.
- » Encourage your children to embrace practicing under varying constraints (differing environmental conditions, under time pressure etc). This enhances skill progression and robustness, adaptability and coping skills and it can also be fun and challenging.

TIP 7: Don't underestimate the power of observational learning

- » Foster your child's observational learning by allowing them to watch sport live or on television.
- » Allow them to imitate the techniques, routines and mannerisms of their positive sporting idols or contemporaries.
- » Support their scholarly interest and craving for information on a sport.
- » Be a positive role model! Always endeavour to provide the appropriate behaviour modelling to your children and young people. Consider the way you react to success and failure, show respect to coaches and officials, demonstrate good sportsmanship, respect and integrity, exhibit good character and upholding personal excellence and a strong work ethic. For excellent guidance on these aspects, see the [ASC's 'Play by the Rules' resources](#).

TIP 8: Foster your child's self-regulatory skills

Taking ownership of the consequences of our own actions, including performance on a sporting field, is a fundamental responsibility of being a person, and an essential component of developing future success. Providing the right opportunities for children and youths to develop and practice age appropriate self-regulatory skills such as self-reflection, goal setting, positive self-talk and mental imagery are valuable strategies.

These are some of the areas you can work on:

- » **Self-reflection:** Encourage your child to not rely solely on your feedback or that of their coach, but to complement it with their own reflections on how they went in practice or competition. Keeping a journal is a useful way to reflect. Use the following prompts to help your child write a journal entry:
 1. get them to describe what happened
 2. get them to reflect on what they were thinking and feeling before, during and after
 3. get them to articulate what felt good or what they did well
 4. ask them what didn't feel good or what can they improve on next time
 5. help them think about what they plan to do next time and how they are going to achieve this.

With practice, your child should be able to follow these prompts on their own.

- » **SMART goal setting:** As an outcome of effective self-reflection, your child should be committed to improving their performance in training or competition. Effective goal setting can help this. Goal setting involves identifying a level of performance or a target, which your child can realistically achieve within an appropriate timeframe. A good idea is to get your child, with your support and guidance, to write down their goals and track their progress. Goals should be 'SMART' - Specific, Measurable, Action-focused, Realistic, and within a Timeframe.
- » **Positive self-talk:** Positive self-talk can increase motivation and is an essential coping skill. Assist your child develop positive 'mantras' or statements they can use when training and competing. Some good examples are 'come on, I can do this' or 'I have trained well and I'm ready to excell'. Self-talk can also be used to assist skill execution, for example 'drive up' or 'follow through'. Positive body language is also important – encourage your child to hold their head up and shoulders back and show their opponents they are ready and confident.
- » **Imagery:** Mental imagery is an excellent adjunct to physical training and has been shown to improve learning and performance.
 - It should be done in a quiet relaxing environment away from distractions.
 - Your child could start by watching an elite athlete performing the skill they want to improve. They should watch their technique and then imagine themselves completing the same action. They should imagine watching themselves perform the technique from a spectator's point of view, as well as imagining what it would look like from an internal perspective.
 - Find which method is most comfortable for them and encourage them to keep practising. It might also help to watch a video of their own performance.

- While practicing mental imagery get your child to try and use all of their senses (sight, touch, taste, sound and smell). What noise is the crowd making? What does their equipment feel like? How does it feel successfully executing their skill? Next time they are training or competing, ask them to focus on all their senses. Encourage them to write down all the details of one of their better performances. They should include as much information as they can and recreate this performance in their mind.
- For further information and resources have a look at the [Brainwaves fact sheets](#) developed by AIS sport psychologists.

TIP 9: Help your child become sport-ready!

It is important for sporting participants to have an understanding of, and strategies for, effectively managing the demands and requirements related to being an athlete. With appropriate guidance and practice, these strategies can become lifelong habits.

These complementary skills include:

- » Understanding the importance of having a sound athletic base (e.g. optimal neuromuscular flexibility, muscular strength and stability of the major joint complexes, good 'whole body' coordination) and maintaining good physical health.
- » Knowing how to properly warm-up and cool down before and after training and competition, and understand why it's important.
- » Knowing how to prevent and manage sport related injuries and illness and knowing who to consult for further assistance.
- » Understanding the importance of good nutritional habits.
- » Having a good awareness and implementing strategies to monitor and manage hydration, and safely exercising in hot and cold environments.
- » Understanding the importance of not over-training or over-competing.
- » Understanding the importance of rest and recovery.
- » Maintaining a healthy sport-life balance.

Educate yourself and your child on all the above aspects so they exhibit good and consistent sport-smarts. Good sources of information include but are not limited to:

- » [the AIS's nutrition website](#) the [Healthy Active Kids website](#), [Kids Vids](#) and [Online Games](#), are excellent resources aimed at children
- » [International Olympic Committee Consensus Statement on Nutrition](#)
- » [International Olympic Committee Consensus Statement on Youth Athlete Development](#)
- » [Injury Prevention App developed by the International Olympic Committee](#) your child's coach or club.

TIP 10 : Find the right coach and club for your child

Do your research when looking for the right coach and club match for your child.

Characteristics of good developmental clubs include:

- » quality coaching personnel that are experienced in coaching developing athletes and are appropriately accredited
- » the provision of appropriate developmental opportunities and progression
- » positive, supportive, encouraging and welcoming club culture for you and your children
- » effective communication and engagement strategies to support children and their parents
- » approachable mentors
- » quality training facilities which are nearby and accessible
- » close connection with local schools and their respective state and national organisations.

Characteristics of a good coach include:

- » strong and effective communication
- » encouraging, good motivator
- » strong teaching ability
- » confident and relaxed style
- » take a personal interest and show a duty of care to the welfare of their athletes
- » stress a balance between life and sport
- » a detailed knowledge of the sport
- » awareness and consideration of the impact of biological and psychological maturation on skill development and performance. A good coach understands that optimal development is individualised, considerate of psychological and sport-specific skills as well as physical attributes, and takes time, diligence and patience. They provide support and opportunity to 'late-maturing' and 'early-maturing' athletes through a focus on sport-specific and psychological skill development rather than pure physicality.

As a parent you can assist your child's coach by supporting their approach and philosophy and showing them respect. If you have any concerns regarding your child, other than an immediate safety concern, approach them when they are not coaching or instructing.