

SPORT COACH+ RESOURCES

Potential benefits and harms of sport



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Potential Benefits	Potential Harms
Provides young players the opportunity to stay active, support general fitness, coordination, balance and keep bodies strong. Sport also benefits their health and cardiovascular system through exercise, supports good sleeping patterns, and relieves stress and tension. The foundation of health is laid in childhood. Children and young people who lead a physically active life are more likely to live healthier lives as adults.	Sport exclusively focused on competition and performance can marginalise players who have less ability and negatively impact their sense of self-efficacy and self-confidence.
Fulfils the right of young people to play, have fun and to do things they enjoy. Evidence shows that it is important that young players can participate in the type of sport or physical activity they enjoy, and do so in a supportive environment ¹ .	When players with different backgrounds (cultures, religions, genders, ages, abilities, or political beliefs) are brought together for sport, harm can result if conscious effort isn't made to ensure everyone feels included, safe, and respected.
A safe and supportive sport environment provides the opportunity for young players to build relationships with adults, friends, peers and positive mentors in their life.	If a coach is unable to model compassion, fairness, self-control, and kindness, it is less likely the players will experience these important social and emotional skills within their team, and the sport environment may be less safe and welcoming for all.
Safe and supportive sport provides young players a sense of belonging within a positive and nurturing community.	Possibility of injury or physical harm. Lack of safe, quality equipment or training space appropriate to the needs of young players may cause physical risks.
Safe and supportive sport meets the psychological needs of young players for autonomy, competence and relatedness, improving their motivation and wellbeing.	A coach lacks knowledge of the context and culture and therefore cannot adequately address safety issues for players, nor ensure sport respects the dignity and inclusion of all, regardless of ability, gender, religious or ethnic background.

¹ Gardner LA, Magee CA, Vella SA (2023) Enjoyment and behavioural intention predict organised youth sport participation and dropout. *Journal of Physical Activity and Health*. Volume 14: Issue 11 (861-865). Retrieved from <https://journals.humankinetics.com/view/journals/jpah/14/11/article-p861.xml>

Sport provides the opportunity for young players to learn and develop new skills – both sporting skills and life skills.	Inability of a coach to recognise and respond effectively to the difficulties or specific support needs of young players may leave young players feeling isolated, stigmatised or excluded.
Safe and supportive sport that provides challenges matched to a young players' needs and coping capacities provides the opportunity to build self-confidence, self-esteem and self-efficacy.	Inability of a coach to respond promptly, consistently and fairly to situations of danger or crises for the team or individual players, can leave young players feeling insecure or fearful, and can potentially reactivate past stressful experiences.
Belonging in a safe, inclusive and supportive sport environment can contribute to promoting tolerance, community cohesion and peacebuilding. Sport can also help to reduce incidents of violence, by giving people an alternative physical outlet for pent-up frustration.	Inequality among players (e.g., lack of funds for appropriate sport clothing) may cause shame, embarrassment, a sense of devaluation, or reluctance to participate in sport.
Safe and supportive sport can challenge gender stereotypes, create female or nonbinary role models, and provide a safe space for young people of all genders.	Negative stereotypes or societal norms can be perpetuated and entrenched through sport that is not safe and supportive, including hypermasculinity, male-dominated spaces, and exclusion of young players based on gender or ability.
Young players can learn not only sport skills but also life skills such as: problem-solving, teamwork, discipline, fair play and empathy, initiative, leadership, conflict resolution and non-violent communication skills, and skills to respond in healthy ways to wins and losses or disappointments.	Challenges for young players that are not appropriately matched to their needs and coping capacities (e.g., sport skills challenges, challenges in working in a team, coping with success and failure), may lead to feelings of frustration, aggression or unwillingness to continue participating in sport.