Characteristics of young people

The physical, cognitive, social and emotional development of young people has implications for coaches, such as:

- **Toddler to pre-school children** require mostly unstructured and creative play
- **5 – 9 year olds** need opportunities to develop a broad range of skills, movement patterns and have fun
- **10 – 14 year olds** enjoy peer interaction and social opportunities
- **15 – 18 year olds** may choose to specialise or take part for recreation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Physical development</th>
<th>Cognitive (intellectual) development</th>
<th>Social development</th>
<th>Emotional development</th>
<th>Implications for coaching</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Toddler to pre-</td>
<td>• Steady gains in height and weight</td>
<td>• Like to watch and imitate</td>
<td>• Will initially like to play alone. The capacity to play in the company of others will gradually increase but may not necessarily occur interactively. Activity with parents is also important</td>
<td>• Move through a stage of developing trust and security to a stage of autonomy. Opportunities for creative and extensive play can significantly advance young people’s autonomy</td>
<td>• This age group requires activity leadership rather than coaching. Structured physical activity includes games and activities that you direct or do with them. Unstructured physical activity includes supervised free play time. About twice as much unstructured activity should be available than structured activity. Opportunities for creative play should occur daily</td>
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<td>school</td>
<td>• Development of large muscle group movement, eg. walk, leap, run, jump</td>
<td>• Highly imaginative in play</td>
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<td>• Ball-handing skills develop to being able to track large soft objects eg beach balls and can trap and kick larger balls</td>
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<td>5 to 9 years</td>
<td>• Development in vision, hearing, movement control and physical size</td>
<td>• Increasing awareness of self and others</td>
<td>• Begin to play interactively with others - strong development of social skills</td>
<td>• Begin by thinking fairness happens when they get their way</td>
<td>• Provide opportunities to develop a broad range of skills. Teach and encourage cooperation, friendship and fairness. Slowly introduce new skills without overloading. Communication should be kept simple and minimal. Set up activities that allow participants to achieve success. Make them feel valued and develop a sense of belonging. Use their imagination to make new drills or activities fun. Establish and follow routines and responsibilities, eg. drink breaks, equipment care</td>
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<td>• Development of problem solving skills</td>
<td>• Like to belong to a team</td>
<td>• Can test boundaries</td>
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<td>• Learn best by exploring</td>
<td>• Are empowered by choices</td>
<td>• Like feeling and seeing their own success and accomplishments</td>
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<td>• Like repetition</td>
<td>• Understand rules and reasons for decisions when rules are violated if they are made clear</td>
<td>• Are curious and imaginative</td>
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<td>• Like to understand how things work</td>
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<td>• Will not initially have a strong sense of time</td>
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Beginning Coaching General Principles – Characteristics of young people 1
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<th>10 to 14 years</th>
<th>15 to 18 years</th>
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| • Peak growth time — may create an energy drain in older children and adolescents who train seriously in sport  
• For children taking sports participation seriously, they can respond to strictly supervised and developmentally appropriate resistance training regimes | • Growth in weight and height continuing in boys and slowing in girls  
• Relatively high levels of testosterone in males can support muscle strength and power gains  
• Late developers can come into a ‘catch up’ phase |
| • Capable of formal abstract thinking  
• Improved concentration, memory and reliability  
• Emerging sense of humour  
• Interested in fairness and what others say about it  
• Can seek increased opportunities to show responsibility and ownership | • Can learn from mistakes  
• Continuing to increase in awareness of strategies and consequences |
| • Growing importance of friendship, peer approval and self-identity  
• Seek recognition of competence  
• Self-esteem is dependent on what others think and self identity becomes more complex  
• Can develop strong empathy with others  
• They like others to know what is important to them | • Continued need for peer approval  
• Enjoy belonging and social identity  
• Establish sexual identity  
• Willing to experiment with different roles and responsibilities |
| • Relationships and beliefs become increasingly important  
• Enjoy a sense of belonging  
• Self-identity is better defined  
• Enjoy being empowered by their own thoughts, decisions and accomplishments | • Enjoy being part of decision-making  
• Maturing ability to discuss, challenge and understand feelings of others  
• Strengthening sense of self-awareness |
| • Incorporate fundamental skills with increasing concentration  
• Schedule/teach recovery and rest  
• Avoid being too outcome focused  
• Facilitate team or group approaches to winning and losing  
• Plan diversity of training and days off for ‘serious participants’  
• Encourage broad participation within and across sports  
• Be prepared to accept discussion on important issues  
• Teach about reflecting on inappropriate behaviour and remaining positive  
• Encourage, support and facilitate a growing sense of community, eg, volunteer support opportunities  
• Provide peer interaction and social opportunities for group members  
• Share planning and re-planning  
• Comment positively on their importance and their strengths | • Optimal time to begin specialist training in many sports for participants showing a serious commitment. Nevertheless, growth, family and education constraints should prevent an adult load being imposed on a young body (but this may be dependent on the activity)  
• Some participants only want to take part for recreation while others are more serious. Sporting opportunities need to reflect diverse motivations of young people  
• Consider setting individual effort-based goals for early and late developers to decrease a focus on winning and losing |