

## **INFORMATION FOR TENNIS PARENTS**

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#### **OBJECTIVE**

The purpose of this document is for parents to be more familiar with:

- The importance of Physical activity for young children
- Why Tennis is a good choice for children
- Introductory Tennis Programs
- What's involved if a child is selected for the Tennis Ireland Regional Training Program
- Being a tennis parent
- Parent and Coach Relationship

#### **STARTING CHILDREN ON THE ROAD OF ACTIVITY**

A five or six year old child doesn't normally wake up one morning and decide he or she wants to play tennis or any activity.

Children's desire to participate in an activity is usually prompted by people who have the most influence over youngsters.

In most cases, it's the parents or guardians who encourage their children to participate in activities. Music, speech and drama, ballet, Irish dancing, art, extra languages and of course sport are just some of the extra curricular activities parents encourage their young children to take part in.

The more privileged a family is, the more likely it is that children will participate in many of these activities on a weekly basis

#### **THE IMPORTANCE OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AS A BASE FOR ALL SPORT**

The introduction of children to unorganized and organized physical activity is critical in order to start them on a healthy lifestyle.

With the changes in Irish culture, children are spending more sedentary lifestyles. More time at the computer, the play station, mobile phone and cartoon networks. In addition, because of security fears, children are been driven to and from daily activities. Fast and frozen food for meals are seen as a quick fix for households where both parents are successful in their jobs or are working because they need to make ends meet. All of these contributory factors have caused more obesity to prevail in young children. Obesity in children, according to medical experts will lead to all sorts of medical problems when they become adults. Diabetes and heart disease are just two potential conditions that have been mentioned in the media.

When many of us were children, we didn't have the technological gadgets of today. We entertained ourselves with outdoor activities such as climbing, running, throwing, skipping, chasing, cycling and swimming as well as unorganized and organized sport. We walked and cycled to school, friend's houses and to sports. We ate more healthy foods which was mostly our

mothers home cooking.

Another serious issue in the Irish sport system, that has partially caused Irish kids to be some of the most unfit in Europe, is the lack of PE at primary school level.

As a parent of two children who both attended the same primary school I quietly observed the schools performance over 12 years. The school got top marks on, academics, communication with parents, relationship between teacher and pupil, school play, extra curricular activity and its policy on bullying. The school also had a firm but fair Principal, who had respect from the pupils, the parents and the school staff.

PE as in every school was one day per week for 30 minutes. I made a point of asking my children how they got on in school each day and as a professional sports coach, I had a particular interest in what physical activities they were doing. On the PE day, I would quiz them about what was happening in the class and a lot of the time they would appear to be doing a good variety of activities.

Too often, however, they would tell me that some of the children were misbehaving and as punishment the teacher cancelled PE. Or, the school hall was been prepared for the Christmas concert so they couldn't do PE.

I was always appalled at this attitude by teachers and through my experience of traveling and meeting parents from clubs around the country I discovered it's the same story all over Ireland. If we as Irish Parents heard that the teacher was canceling the math or Irish lesson because children were bold, we would be up in arms and going straight to the school to complain. As parents it is vital that we understand that, just as numeracy, literacy, art and music are important for a child then so too is physical literacy.

The current facts are:

- PE in school is insufficient
- Irish children are less fit than their European mainland counter parts.
- There are more over weight children in Ireland now than ever before.

### **WHO ARE THE BEST PEOPLE TO TACKLE THESE PROBLEMS?**

Being aware of these problems and in the absence of the government doing anything in a hurry, it's important that we as parents either become involved in our children's activities or enroll them in sports that will enhance their physical development.

If parents are to assist with tackling these problems, it's important that we gain knowledge and understanding of the skills and physical capacities that are important to help young children develop.

### **MOTOR SKILL DEVELOPMENT**

Running, jumping, throwing, kicking and catching are very important skills to teach children at an early age. Balance, coordination, speed and agility are the most important physical capacities

to focus on during pre puberty. Sports science tells us that if these capacities are not trained well before puberty then performance athletes/players will fail to meet their full potential. Recreational players will lose out as well as they may drop out of sport through feeling incompetent as a result of not been exposed to these capacities at an early age.

### **HOW CAN PARENTS HELP THEIR CHILDREN**

During the toddler and pre-school years for 10 – 20 minutes per day have some fun with your child by trying some of the following activities. Use your imagination and come down to the child's level.

1. Climbing chairs, beds and the stairs with you behind them of course for safety.
2. Jumping on the bed like a trampoline or use an old mattress if you are concerned about the bed
3. Catching and striking balloons with the hand.
4. Rolling balls, starting with big light ones and varying the sizes.
5. Strike balloons with table tennis bat.
6. Roll ball along ground with a bat.
7. Strike ball along ground with a bat.
8. Kick a ball with both feet.
9. Catch a variety of balls.
10. Throw balls or rubber rings under arm into a container or at a target
11. You throw and he or she fetches a ball as fast as they can over short distances
12. Hopping, skipping and chasing games.
13. Over arm throw with a table tennis ball. Technique on this action is very important. Use the following check - list.
  - Hold ball with thumb and the two first fingers
  - Throwing arm bent and elbow starting at shoulder level
  - Turn side ways and point free hand at target.
  - Make sure the throw looks like a baseball pitch and not a cricket bowl.
  - Progress to a small rubber ball no bigger than a golf ball.
  - If you live near a beach, bring the child down to the seashore and make a game out of throwing stones that you select.
  - See if he or she can initiate the throw by using the legs

A good technical throwing action is very important to develop the tennis serve and good work here will pay dividends later on.

On the winter weekends bring the children to the Giraffe Center or the Leisure Plex and let them at it. In the better weather, bring them to the park playground. Continue on these activities until the child reaches 1<sup>st</sup> class in Primary school usually around 6 or 7 years of age. This is the time that you should be thinking about enrolling your child in sports or activities that will consolidate and build on what you have already developed.

## **WHAT SPORTS SHOULD YOU CHOOSE**

Research has shown that tennis is:

- One of the healthiest, least injurious sports youngsters can play.
- It is a lifetime sport.
- It is a family sport
- It builds self-confidence and self-esteem.
- It teaches self-discipline, self-reliance and respect for others.
- But, above all, it provides a good way of performing physical exercise whilst having fun.

If you have tennis in mind as the sport that you would really like your child to take serious in future years, or you would just like him or her to join a club for recreational and social reasons. It's important that you are aware that tennis is not a sport that children should specialize in too soon. Tennis is a one sided sport and its important at an early age that children are exposed to sports as well as tennis that will give them multi lateral development. This will enhance their physical development and will have a positive effect on their tennis ability in later years. Parents should look at a variety of sports and I've suggested some below that I feel are good for motor skill development and have more than one objective.

- Swimming - develops coordination, heart and lungs, body strength and water safety.
- Martial Art - develops balance coordination, dexterity, body speed, agility, self- defense and discipline.
- Football develops foot eye coordination, balance leg strength, speed, agility and team play.
- Basketball - develops hand eye coordination, balance, leg strength, body strength, speed, agility and team play.
- Tennis develops, hand eye coordination, balance, throwing skill, agility and speed.

There are other activities that help certain aspects of motor skills such as, gymnastics; ballet & Irish dancing and parents should explore these activities as well.

## **RECREATIONAL WEEKLY ACTIVITY PLAN FROM 6 YEARS OF AGE**

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Rest day	Tennis	Soccer	Swimming	Karate	Fun Competition in any sport	Basketball

A well-organized Child friendly Tennis Club should have a variety of activities from six years of age to teenage years. This should involve coaching, skill awards, supervised competition and social events. Junior recreational players if they are encouraged from parents, coaches and club officials they will eventually become senior members of clubs and will enjoy tennis as a game

for the rest of their life.

Having enrolled your child in tennis as one of the weekly activities, and you and the Club Coach discover that he or she is showing talent in the sport.

A number of things need to be considered.

1. Make sure the child is enthusiastic about tennis and prefers it more to the other activities
2. Make sure one of the parents has time to commit to transporting the child to extra lessons and other related activities that will increase, as the child gets older.
3. Choose a club that:
  - Employs qualified Tennis Ireland registered coaches
  - Has two appointed Children's Officers
  - Is a child friendly club and uses modified versions of tennis such as Mini & Midi Tennis as a means of introducing and developing children's tennis skills

You also need to be aware of the following:

1. If the Governing body spots the child's talent they will be invited at 8 years of age to participate in a Regional squad for 6 hours per week.
2. If they progress through the regional level to national level they will be expected by 12 years of age to do 3-4 hours training per day for 5-6 days a week at a central location.
3. Its important to know at an early stage that tennis is a professional sport and all coaches get paid for their time. This makes tennis the most expensive to participate in of all the sports I mentioned above and as your child develops and becomes more involved, it gets more expensive. Tennis, however, is very rewarding if players succeed. Players in the top 100 rankings are all making a good living from the sport.

### **WEEKLY ACTIVITY PLAN WITH TENNIS AS THE MAIN FOCUS FROM 6 YEARS OF AGE**

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Rest day	Tennis	Soccer	Swimming Tennis	Karate	Fun Competition in Tennis	Basketball Tennis

As I mentioned earlier the participation in the other sports is critical as it helps the child's overall physical development. As a child gets older usually around 12 years of age, the other sports are replaced by more tennis training and some of these sports are incorporated into the tennis training.

### **COMPETITION FOR THE EARLY YEARS**

- All competition should be FUN

- Start with self competition – Tennis Ireland Skill Awards, 6 -7 years of age
- Advance to Mini Tennis for u8's and Midi Tennis for u9's
- Every one should be a winner. We don't want Mini & Midi Club Champions or Regional Champions. Every one should get a prize for participating.
- Competition should be a team event with a mix of a variety of sports – Tennis, Soccer, Basketball and Olympic Handball.
- Boys and girls should be mixed together on the teams
- The competition format should not be knock out but a format that provides the children with plenty of matches – Round Robin
- When children get to the u10 age group it should be still Round Robin format for the recreational club players and Feed in Consolation and Play Back formats should be introduced for the Regional players.

### **BEING A GOOD TENNIS PARENT**

Today, more children than ever before are taking part in tennis.

There's a big difference, however, between learning the basic strokes to play the game at recreational level, and competing successfully at a high level.

Individual competitive sports like tennis teach the youngsters to work hard, to learn to manage stress to perform under pressure, and test emotional and physical balance.

Unfortunately competitive tennis may also impose pressures, that are damaging if handled wrongly.

It's important to encourage young performers to focus mostly on performance rather than on tennis results only or outcomes.

Effort and hard work should be rewarded ahead of success and results only.

Promote the perspective that tennis is only a sport emphasising its value as a preparation for life.

Don't make tennis bigger than life by, for instance, placing more importance on tennis than schoolwork.

As a tennis parent, try to understand and have empathy with the emotional pressures and the complexity of the sport itself.

Don't underestimate the stresses of an individual sport.

Give your children tasks and responsibilities that will in time, build self-confidence and independence

Ensure that the tennis competitive experience is appropriate and a positive one, principally from the perspective of developing the person.

Emphasise the important elements of sportsmanship, ethics, personal development, responsibility and a positive attitude towards others and, by doing so share with your child a healthy interest in a great sport.

Don't allow training and competition to become a negative experience for you or your child. Realise that children not only have the right to participate in tennis but also, to choose not to participate.

Let your child know you care and are there if they need you to help them.

Don't become over involved in your child's tennis.

Be prepared to listen and learn and avoid thinking that you know everything about tennis.

## **PARENTS & THE COACH**

Show an interest in your child's coach by having regular meetings and discussions regarding your child's progress.

Ensure that the coach you choose is qualified and signed up to the Tennis Ireland Code of Ethics. Be sure you understand the coach's philosophy and his/her teaching methodology.

Once you are happy with this you should show respect for his/her expertise.

Be sure that the coach understands what your child's goals are in tennis.

Prior to hiring a new coach for your child, ensure that any previous coach – student relationship has been ended in a professional and ethical manner.

Understand that your child's coach is a qualified professional who can help your child in many areas, both tennis and others, and also help you to understand and to know more about tennis

Assist the coach by helping them through your experiences to gain insights into and a better understanding of your child's personality and feelings.

Avoid considering the coach as merely an employee or "ball feeder" who has only professional goals.

## **CODE OF CONDUCT FOR PLAYERS**

### **The tennis player will:**

- Play fairly and have fun
- Abide by the rules set down by team managers when travelling to away events.
- Behave in a manner that avoids bringing the game of tennis into disrepute.
- Respect officials and accept their decisions
- Talk to the children's officer if you have concerns
- Respect opponents and always shake hands at the end of a match
- Use his/her best efforts in competitive matches
- Refrain from the use of bad language and inappropriate gestures
- Refrain from ball/ racquet abuse
- Refrain from the use of coaching during competition
- Never use unfair or bullying tactics to gain advantage on or off the court
- Never use bullying tactics to isolate another player
- Never pass on gossip about another player or adult
- Never make false allegations about another player or adult
- Never keep secrets about anyone who has caused you harm
- Win with grace and lose with dignity

## **Children in Tennis**

**Child/Youth members have the right to:-**

- Be safe
- Be listened to
- Be respected
- Privacy
- Enjoy your sport in a protective environment
- Be referred to professional help if needed
- Be protected from abuse by other member or outside sources.
- Participate on an equal basis, appropriate to their ability
- Experience competition and the desire to win
- Be believed
- Ask for help

## **Code of Conduct for Coaches /Sports Leaders**

### **The Tennis Coach/ Sports leader should:**

- Ensure the safety of all children by careful supervision, proper pre- planning of coaching/ playing sessions, using safe methods at all times.
- Actively encourage all children not to discriminate on the grounds of religious beliefs, race, gender, social classes or lack of ability.
- Emphasise fun and participation.
- Not allow any rough or dangerous play, bullying, or the use of bad language or inappropriate behaviour.
- Always be positive and to promote the objectives of the club at all times.
- Not let any allegations of abuse of any kind to go unchallenged or unrecorded if appropriate. Incidents and accidents to be recorded in the club incident/accident book. Parents will be informed.
- Report accidents or incidents of alleged abuse to the designated person.
- Administer minor first aid in the presence of others and where required refer more serious incidents to the club "first aider"
- Have access to telephone for immediate contact to emergency services if required.
- Foster team work to ensure the safety of youth members in their care
- Ensure the rights and responsibilities of youth members are enforced
- Report suspected abuse to the appropriate designated officer
- Not abuse members physically, emotionally or sexually
- Maintain confidentiality about sensitive information
- Be a role model (disciplined / committed / time keeping), remember children learn by example
- Refrain from smoking and consumption of alcohol during club activities or coaching sessions

- Hold current coaches insurance
- Never ask anyone to keep secrets of any kind
- Ensure that car insurance is appropriate for transporting young people to and from events
- Ensure that all those working with young people do so under the guidance of the coach.
- As a coach keep my knowledge updated through the Tennis Ireland Continuous Professional Development
- Protect myself from false accusation by...
  - Not spending excessive amounts of time alone with children away from others
  - Avoid taking children alone in a car on journeys, however short
  - Never taking children to their home.
  - Not administering First Aid involving the removing of children's clothing unless in the presence of others.

## **CONCLUSION**

In the outset I highlighted the main objectives of the document was to make parents aware of:

- The importance of Physical activity for young children
- Why Tennis is a good choice for children
- Recommended introductory Tennis Programs
- What's involved if a child is selected for the Tennis Ireland Regional Training Program
- Being a tennis parent
- Parent and Coach Relationship

I hope parents who are new to the game or indeed former players, find the information useful in assisting the development of their children towards been a performance player or a player who plays for social and recreational purposes. Either way by participating in the game of tennis they are making a great choice as a game that they can play and enjoy for life while contributing towards a healthy lifestyle.

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**TENNIS IRELAND**

