

GECKO SPORTS SUBMISSION: HEALTHY FUTURES COMMISSION

15/06/2017

ABOUT US

Gecko Sports is Australia's leading provider of exercise and physical activity programs for children. Gecko Sports has a focus on fun fitness as well as a multi-sport basis. The program serves as an introduction to several sports and development of essential gross motor skills and functional movement.

BENEFITS OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND EXERCISE IN YOUNG PEOPLE

Research has consistently shown that regular physical activity in childhood and adolescence minimises the likelihood of many preventable diseases. Physical benefits of exercise in young people includes reducing cholesterol, preventing type 2 diabetes by maintaining stable blood glucose levels, improving cardiac health, preventing obesity, and increasing bone and muscle strength (Donnelly et al., 2016). In addition to the physical benefits of exercise there are numerous reported social and emotional benefits for young people, such as increased self-esteem and self confidence (Network, 2017; Ten Hoor et al, 2016).

BENEFITS OF RESISTANCE TRAINING IN YOUNG PEOPLE

According to the Australian Physical Activity Guidelines children and young people should participate in regular exercise, with a particular focus on resistance or strength training at least three times per week. When performed under the guidance of qualified and knowledgeable professionals, resistance training is safe and effective in this age group. The benefits of strength training in children include increased muscular strength and power, improved bone health, weight control, improvement in body composition, and a reduction in the frequency of sports related injuries (Faigenbaum, Lloyd & Myer, 2013).

BENEFITS OF PLAYING MULTIPLE SPORTS IN CHILDHOOD

Participation in team sport activities is reported to have an increased benefit on psychological health over and above the benefits of physical activity in children. This includes improved self esteem and social interaction due to the social nature of sport (Eime, 2013).

Children who sample various sports are also more likely to continue to exercise regularly into adulthood, compared to those who undergo early specialisation in one sport (Kirk, 2005). Sampling sports during childhood thus appears to foster a lifelong relationship with exercise because it is seen as fun and engaging, rather than solely for skill development. Sampling is also considered to build life skills, adaptability and pro-social behaviours in young people (Cote, Horton, MacDonald & Wilkes, 2009).

AUSTRALIAN PHYSICAL ACTIVITY GUIDELINES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

The Australian National Physical Activity Guidelines recommend that children and young people, aged between 5 – 17 years, accumulate at least 60 minutes of exercise per day. It is also recommended that some of this time is spent performing vigorous physical activity, as well as strength and resistance training in order to strengthen muscles and bones (Department of Health 2017).

BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION IN SPORT IN CHILDHOOD

There are a number of documented barriers that restrict children and young people from exercising, both intrinsic and extrinsic to the child. Intrinsic barriers to exercise in young people include individual characteristics, beliefs and expectations about physical activity, and increased participation in technology related activities, such as television and video games. Extrinsic barriers to exercise include influence of family and friends, time restrictions, age limits for certain activities, inaccessibility and cost (Allison et al., 2005).

ADDRESSING BARRIERS TO EXERCISE, SPORT AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Gecko Sports is at the forefront of encouraging physical activity in children around Australia. We aim to reduce the barriers to participation for children in exercise by providing an easily accessible, flexible, and low cost multi-sport and fun fitness program. We believe that no child is too young to become active and healthy, and therefore offer programs to children as young as five years old.

Gecko Sports is currently offering programs for two age groups – Youngsters (5-8 years) and Midsters (9-12 years). This split allows for children of similar developmental age bands to participate and be active together. The group format, inclusiveness and non-competitive nature of Gecko Sports allow children to improve their physical fitness, as well as social skills and self-confidence in a welcoming and inclusive environment.

Gecko Sports aims to offer a similar model to children as an adult gym. This is done through encouraging children to attend our structured 45-minute classes up to three times per week. This class structure is in line with the recommended Australian guidelines for young people; i) performing regular vigorous exercise, ii) performing weekly resistance training. A strong emphasis is placed on the performance of safe methods of strength training using body weight resistance and functional movements (e.g., squats, planks). All Gecko Sports sessions are supervised and monitored by trained and knowledgeable coaches and fitness experts.

One of other major aspect of Gecko Sports programs is the multi-sport focus. The program runs in 10-week cycles in line with the school term. Throughout the 10 week period children receive an introduction to eight different sports (netball, volleyball, rugby league, AFL, soccer, basketball, cricket and athletics) combined with fun fitness activities. This multi-sport facet allows the program to tap into the documented benefits of sampling sports in childhood. In light of our multi-sports program we therefore become a pathway for children into those sports where otherwise they might not have had the exposure in a fun non-competitive environment.

Lastly, Gecko Sports aims to make every experience fun for the child. We believe our program is suitable for all children. Fun, enjoyable and positive experiences foster continued engagement in physical activity and sport. This is implemented through programming, as well as committed and trained coaches that aim to develop personal relationships with each child. We have seen how friendships and bonds created through sport last a life time, we like to encourage this in a non-competitive environment where we have serious fun with the kids.

HOW GECKO SPORTS CAN GET INVOLVED

Gecko Sports would like to strongly advocate the Healthy Futures Commission. We hope to see the Bill passed and would very much like to get involved in any way we can.

The message underpinning this Bill sits in-line with Gecko Sports ethos. We, therefore feel we would be an important ambassador of the committee should we be nominated to take part. We would be honoured to support and represent this important message within our State and start to make a difference. The impact we see from what Gecko Sports offers the local communities is only a small part of what we as a nation-wide company would like to achieve.

To follow on and support our submission, we would encourage a face-to-face meeting where we can discuss how we can assist working towards the end goal of creating healthier futures for Queensland children and adolescents.

Please feel free to contact us should you have any questions or queries. We are eager to be involved, even if it would be to the effect of a chair within the Board or becoming an active member of the Committee. We would welcome any chance to support this important health and wellbeing message.

J.ScottHunter

Yours sincerely,

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(Gecko Sports Gold Coast Franchisees & Gecko Sports Owner and Managing Director)

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